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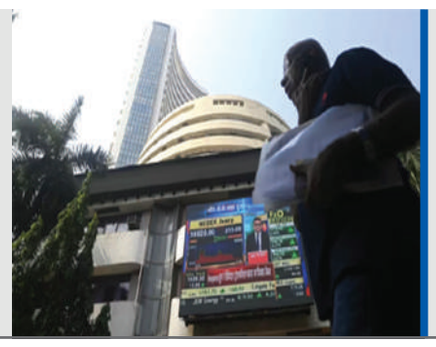

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83% of jobless Indians are youth: Report

I'ntl Labour Organisation report says educated youth who are unemployed has doubled to 65.7%

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

India's youth faces significant challenges with high unemployment rates, where approximately 83 per cent of the unemployed individuals are youth, according to the India Employment Report 2024 report released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute of Human Development (IHD).

The report highlights a worrying trend showing that the percentage of educated young individuals, with at least a secondary education, among all unemployed youth has almost doubled from 35.2 per cent in 2000 to 65.7 per cent in 2022.

Dropout rates following secondary education continue to be elevated, especially in less affluent regions and among marginalized communities.

While there is an increase in enrollment in higher education, there are ongoing quality issues, with notable learning deficiencies identified in both school and higher education settings, according to the report.

The study indicates that there was a notable increase in youth employment and underemployment from 2000 to 2019, but these rates decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic years.

Interestingly, educated young individuals faced notably higher levels of unemployment during this time frame.

Moreover, the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR), and Unemployment Rate (UR) all showed a consistent decline from 2000 to 2018, followed by signs of recovery after 2019, as emphasized in the report.

However, the report's authors advise careful interpretation of this improvement due to uncertainties about the factors driving these changes. Wages have mostly stayed the same or decreased, with real wages for both regular employees and self-employed individuals declining post-2019. Many unskilled part-time workers did not receive the required minimum wages in 2022.

Nearly 90 per cent of workers are involved in informal employment, while the proportion of formal employment, which had been rising since 2000, decreased post-2018 ***PHOTO: ANI***

Significant differences in employment results are evident among states, with specific states consistently performing poorly in employment metrics.

Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh have faced challenges with employment outcomes, showcasing the impact of regional policies. India faces a critical moment regarding youth employment, given its demographic advantage. With a considerable part of the population in the working age group, India has the opportunity to leverage its demographic dividend, the report said.

But the advantage of having a significant youth population, which made up 27 per cent of the total population in 2021, is expected to decline to 23 per cent by 2036.

Nearly 90 per cent of workers are involved in informal employment, while the proportion of formal employment, which had been rising since 2000, decreased post-2018, said report. *—Salar News*

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Kalamandalam allows boys to learn Mohiniyattam

THRISSUR, 27 MARCH

In a path-breaking move, Kerala Kalamandalam, the prestigious deemed-to-be university for art and culture, decided on Wednesday to admit students to its various courses regardless of gender. An executive meeting held on campus unanimously approved the decision, which will be implemented in the next academic year, the university registrar said in a statement. With this decision, men, women and transgenders can now enroll in all the courses offered by Kalamandalam, including classical dance forms such as "Mohiniyattam," which had been strictly reserved for women until now, a Kalamandalam source said. The eminent institution took the historic decision at a time when the state has been witnessing a raging row over recent racist remarks made by a senior Mohiniyattam dancer against a fellow artist on a YouTube channel. As the video of the racial remarks by Sathyabhama went viral on social media and was aired on news channels last week, noted Mohiniyattam dancer RLV Ramakrishnan had alleged that her comments were directed at him. *—PTI*

HC denies relief to Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Delhi High Court on Wednesday refused to interfere with the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam'.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma issued notice on Kejriwal's petition challenging his arrest and the subsequent remand to the ED's custody, and asked the agency to file its response to it as well as his plea for interim relief of release before 2 April.

Kejriwal, who was arrested on 21 March and subsequently remanded to ED's custody sought his immediate release on the ground that the arrest was illegal.

However, Court will hear a public interest litigation praying for the removal of Kejriwal from holding the post of Chief Minister.

The bench of Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora is scheduled to hear the matter today.

AAP MLAs wear face masks as they protest at the Delhi Assembly against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal by ED on Wednesday ***PHOTO: ANI***

- Kejriwal, who was arrested on 21 March and subsequently remanded to ED's custody sought his immediate release on the ground that the arrest was illegal.

The plea stated that after the arrest of Kejriwal, Minister of Govt of NCT of Delhi Atishi gave interviews to various channels on 21 March, stating and affirming that Kejriwal will not resign from his post and, if needed, will run the government from jail. She further said, " Kejriwal was the Delhi Chief Minister , is the Chief Minister and will continue to remain theChief Minister , he will not resign, the plea read. *—PTI/ANI*

INDIA SUMMONS US DIPLOMAT OVER KEJRI ARREST JIBE

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

India on Wednesday summoned a senior US diplomat and lodged a strong protest against Washington's remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials summoned the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berbena at its office in South Block here.

Reports had it that a US state department official had said that Washington "encouraged a fair, transparent and timely legal process for Kejriwal".

MEA later in a statement said, "We take strong objection to the remarks of the Spokesperson of the US State Department about certain legal proceedings in India".

India's legal processes are based on "an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes," MEA said in the statement. *—PTI*

60 SPOTS SEARCHED

Lokayukta raids K'taka govt officials

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Karnataka Lokayukta conducted raids at 60 locations across the state targeting 13 government officers on Wednesday. The operation involved a team of 130 officers, including 13 SPs, 12 Deputy SPs, and 25 police inspectors.

The raids are underway in Bengaluru, Bidar, Ramanagara, Uttara Kannada, Udupi, Kodagu, Mysuru and Vijayapura districts.

In Bengaluru, Lokayukta officials raided five locations related to properties owned by the Chief Engineer of BBMP. Similar raids were carried out in other districts as well.

In addition to the raids in Bengaluru, the residences and properties of an executive engineer from the Water Resources Department in Kalaburagi and three locations in Bidar were also raided. Similarly, the residence of a Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) was raided in Ramanagara district.

PHOTO: PTI

These raids were initiated based on information suggesting the disproportionate accumulation of wealth by these government officers compared to their known sources of income. Karnataka Lokayukta is yet to issue an official statement regarding the matter. *—PTI*

Electoral bonds world's biggest scam: Economist

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Parakala Prabhakar, economist and former spokesperson of Andhra Pradesh BJP said the electoral bond issue will cost the ruling BJP heavily.

Prabhakar who is also Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's husband said the electoral bonds were the biggest scam not only in India but the world.

No money to contest LS polls, says Nirmala

Meanwhile, Sitharaman on said that all major political parties have encashed electoral bonds and nobody has a moral authority to say anything as it was legal and according to law.

The Minister claims she also declined the offer of BJP to contest elections pleading that she did not have the 'kind of funds' required for fighting the Lok Sabha polls.

Parakala Prabhakar ***PHOTO: ANI***

She said that the BJP President JP Nadda gave her the option to contest either from Andhra Pradesh or Tamil Nadu.

When asked why even the finance minister of the country does not have enough funds to fight Lok Sabha elections, she said that the Consolidated Fund of India does not belong to her. *—Salar News*

LS POLLS: ₹50 CR SEIZED IN K'TAKA IN 12 DAYS

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Seizures in Karnataka on Wednesday crossed Rs 50 crore mark since the model code of conduct came into effect on 16 March, according to Election Commission.

Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka will be held in two phases on 26 April and 7 May for its 28 constituencies.

Since the Model Code of Conduct came into force, the flying squads, static surveillance teams and police authorities have seized Rs 19.69 crore cash, Rs 65.43 lakh freebies, 8.39 lakh litres of liquor worth over Rs 26.19 crore, 133.68 kg narcotic substances worth over Rs 88 lakh, 9.74 kg gold worth over Rs 5.46 crore, 55.75 kg silver worth over Rs 26 lakh and 21.17 carat diamonds worth Rs 9 lakh among others. *—PTI*

RELIGIOUS TOURISM BOOST

Karnataka to get ropeway cars at several tourist destinations

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

The Karnataka Department of Tourism has unveiled plans to introduce ropeway and cable car services at several prominent tourist destinations across the State. This move comes in the wake of boosting religious tourism in the State. Divided into two packages, the initiative aims to enhance accessibility and tourism experience for visitors.

Under the first package, the iconic Madhugiri Fort in Tumakuru District and the scenic Mallalli Falls in Kodagu District have been earmarked for the ropeway development. Professional consultants will be engaged to provide transaction consulting services for the project in the first phase. This includes the preparation of various reports such as the Techno-Economic Facility Report (TEFR), pre-feasibility report, traffic and demand assessment report, and feasibility reports for both draft and final projects. In the second phase, consultants will assist in drafting proposal requests, and concession agreements, and facilitating the bidding process.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The second package focuses primarily on the ropeway development at Nrupatunga Hills in Dharwad District, Saplamma Temple in Gadag District, and Shri Kalakaleshwara Swamy Temple in Gajendragad, Gadag District.

The decision to introduce ropeway and cable car services comes in response to the increasing demand from tourists and devotees alike. Visitors have expressed their desire for enhanced accessibility to these attractions, and ropeway development is considered a promising solution. Additionally, devotees have requested further development of the temple infrastructure to complement the new transportation system as well. *—Salar News*

MERCURY SOARS OVER 40°C IN K'TAKA, GUJARAT

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Temperatures crossed 40-degree-Celcius mark in parts of Karnataka, Gujarat and Rajasthan on Wednesday, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warning of heatwave conditions over these places for the next two days.

An IMD official said the maximum temperatures were two to three notches above normal over these

In a statement, IMD said heatwave conditions are very likely in isolated pockets over North Interior Karnataka during 27 to 29 March.

IMD had earlier forecast that India would experience a warmer summer and more heatwave days this year, with El Nino conditions expected to continue at least until May. However, the analysis said said chance of reaching 40 degrees Celsius has expanded to nine states. *—PTI*

Morgan Stanley raises GDP forecast to 6.8%

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

After S&P Global, Morgan Stanley has revised its GDP growth forecast upwards for the financial year 2024-25 (FY25) to 6.8 per cent, up from its previous estimate of 6.5 per cent. The firm also revised its growth forecast for the ongoing financial year, FY24, to 7.9 per cent.

The revised projections come in the wake of an optimistic outlook on India's economic trajectory, with Morgan Stanley highlighting the country's strength and stability as hallmarks of the current cycle.

The firm anticipates a shallow easing cycle in monetary policy, driven by continued traction in industrial and capital expenditure activities.

According to Morgan Stanley, the outlook for India's GDP growth remains robust, with the expectation that growth will track around 7 per cent in the fourth quarter of the financial year 2023-24 (QE Mar-24).

PHOTO: PIXABAY

This growth momentum is expected to be broad-based, with the gaps between rural-urban consumption and private-public capital expenditure narrowing in FY25. Looking ahead, Morgan Stanley expects headline inflation to average 4.5 per cent in FY25, down from 5.4 per cent in FY24, while core inflation is projected to remain muted at 4.1 per cent. Slower-than-expected global growth, higher commodity prices, and tighter global financial conditions pose risks to India's growth and macroeconomic stability. *—PTI*

Govt to borrow ₹7.5L cr from market in FY25

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Centre plans to raise Rs 7.5 lakh crore through market borrowing in the April-September period of 2024-25 to fund the revenue gap, Finance Ministry said on Wednesday.

Out of the gross market borrowing of Rs 14.13 lakh crore estimated for 2024-25, Rs 7.5 lakh crore, or 53 per cent, is planned to be borrowed in the first half.

The fundraising would be done through dated securities, including Rs 12,000 crore through issuance of sovereign green bonds (SGBs).

Based on market feedback and in line with global market practices, it has been decided to introduce a new dated security of 15-year tenor. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the interim Budget proposed to borrow Rs 14.13 lakh crore by issuing dated securities to meet revenue shortfall in the next financial year, starting 1 April. *—PTI*

SIMs, cash, blades found in Mysuru jail after raids

MYSURU, 27 MARCH

Ahead of Lok Sabha elections, law enforcement officials led by City Police Commissioner Ramesh Bhanot conducted a surprise inspection at the Central Jail in Mysuru. This was to ensure security measures were in place and to prevent any potential disruptions during the electoral process. A team of 200 policemen uncovered SIM cards, cash, blades, and knives within the prisoners' barracks. The raid, which involved a sweep of the jail premises, aimed to prevent inmates from engaging in illegal activities, including communicating with external parties to influence voting outcomes. Ramesh said the discovery of prohibited items in the jail shows the need for thorough security measures to maintain the integrity of the electoral process. *—Salar News*

Tumakuru woman robbed of Rs 3 lakh at gunpoint

TUMAKURU, 27 MARCH

In a shocking incident, unidentified bike-borne assailants robbed Rs Three lakhs at gunpoint near Urkehalli village, in Kunigal taluk of Tumakuru district. The bikers entered the house of Mallika Ganganna and asked for water due to the heat. During this time, the robbers searched the cupboards for money and when other members of the house started shouting, they threatened them at gunpoint. The house owner, Mallika Ganganna was injured in her right leg as the robbers fired the gun three times while they were caught. A case has been registered at Kunigal police station for further investigation. *—Salar News*

BESCOM to open cash counters on general holidays

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) has announced its decision to open cash counters across all subdivisions on the upcoming general holidays, scheduled for 29 and 31 March. This move aims to facilitate consumers in settling their electricity bills conveniently. The online services of all five Electricity Supply Companies in urban areas, which are part of the Restructured Accelerated Power Development and Reforms Programme (RAPDRP), were temporarily halted from 10 to 19 March due to software upgrades. As a result, consumers were unable to make online payments for their electricity bills during this period.*—Salar News*

Duo travels for free in bus; pays Rs 444 for pet birds

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

A video showing a grandmother and a little girl with lovebirds on a KSRTC (Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation) bus has gone viral on social media. The passengers captured the scene of a grandmother and granddaughter sitting in the middle of the bus seat with lovebirds. However, what caught everyone's attention was the whopping fare of Rs 444 charged by KSRTC for transporting four parrots from Bengaluru to Mysuru. Meanwhile, the duo was given free tickets under Shakti Yojana. However, the four parrots were given tickets for Rs 444, which is Rs 111 for one. According to officials, the grandmother and little girl bought lovebirds and travelled to Mysuru at 8 am on Wednesday and the lovebirds were treated as 'children' and given a ticket of Rs 444. As per KSRTC rules, passengers have to buy half a ticket for pets and birds they carry with them. If passengers do not purchase the ticket for their pets, a fine of 10 per cent of their can be levied. *—Salar News*

'Ticket' to Muniyappa's son-in-law irks Cong MLAs

5 Cong legislators threaten to quit over ticket allocation issue

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

A massive political drama erupted in Karnataka over Kolar Lok Sabha ticket in Congress, wherein at least 5 MLAs, including a sitting minister, and 2 MLCs threatened to resign from the party over reports of Kolar ticket being given to Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa's son-in-law KG Chikka Peddanna.

Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar, MLCs Naseer Ahmed and ML Anil Kumar, MLAs KY Nanjegowda and Kothur G Manjunath rushed to Vidhana Soudha to tender their resignation, but stopped as Congress leaders intervened.

Reports suggested that Congress was considering Muniyappa's son-in-law for Kolar Lok Sabha seat. The MLAs and the MLC's alleged that the party distributes tickets within the family and said that since Muniyappa's daughter was already an MLA, the ticket should not go to another relative of the same family.

"We want other people in the party to get a chance. We will talk to the Chief Minister later today. When Muniyappa was here, we were affected by his style of functioning and faced hardship. There is a general feeling in the constituency that SC community is not being represented. We want a candidate from other than this family" state minister MC Sudhakar said.

The MLAs had initially indicated that they would approach Assembly speaker UT Khadir with their resignations but only the two MLCs went to meet legislative council chairman Basavraj Horrati.

The man at the centre of the drama, KH Muniyappa a senior Congress leader and state minister said he would abide by the High command's decision on the Kolar ticket. "I will abide by the Congress party's decisions. Let the party high command take the decision. When they defeated me the High Command did not take any action, the high command gave seat to them, I kept quiet. I don't want to speak on their decision, I am not embarrassing my party. I am a disciplined soldier of the party and will abide by the High Command decision" Muniyappa said.

Congress has a tough fight in SC dominated Kolar with BJP giving the seat to JD(S) which has named Mallesh Babu as its candidate. Karnataka, which has 28 Lok Sabha seats, will vote in two phases on April and 7 May. *—ANI*

While KH Muniyappa's son-in-law is likely to get a Congress ticket, minister MC Sudhakar and MLC Naseer Ahmed rushed to Vidhana Soudha on Wednesday to resign *PHOTO: ANI*

FAKE WHATSAPP CHAT

State BJP files complaint with EC

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Karnataka BJP unit has lodged a complaint with Election Commission (EC) urging them to take action against those circulating a fake WhatsApp message on social media to bring "disrepute" to the party.

In its complaint submitted to the State Chief Electoral Officer on 24 March, it said that a fake WhatsApp message is being circulated in the social media by miscreants. It claims to be circulated by BJP in the following link.

The party said it is not the author of this link or site and the said link or site is fake and the message is fabricated and is intended to be circulated on the social media to bring a bad name to BJP. According to the complaint, the caption of the said message reads as "BJP-Election Bonus" and it claims that the party is officially offering Rs 5,000 and more bonus to each who answers the four questions asked in the questionnaire. Further, the same shows photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and each photo claims that it is of the year 2014, 2019 and 2024.

"It appears clearly from the question and the options given, that the content sought to be derived it is aimed at identifying the gender, age group, and the liking or disliking of the person giving the response with a fake lure of money and further this message is aimed to create doubts in the minds of the electorate that BJP is offering money to vote for them and thereby brings a bad reputation to the party through the circulation of this misleading message," it stated. *—PTI*

Noida CA arrested in ₹168 crore fake bank guarantees scam

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

- The accused, Ashish Roy, 45 was detained at the Indira Gandhi International Airport

A chartered accountant has been arrested for allegedly duping 11 private companies by giving them fake electronic bank guarantees worth Rs 168 crore, City police said on Wednesday.

The accused, Ashish Roy, 45, alias Ashish Saxena, was detained by the immigration officials at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi after he returned from Kuwait, they said. A lookout notice was also issued against him in February by the Bengaluru Police.

According to the police, the matter came to light after an official from National E-Governance Services Limited filed a case of cheating when it was found out that the e-bank guarantees submitted by these companies were fake. Investigation revealed that the accused used his professional network and approached chartered accountants and financial advisers of these private companies on the pretext of providing them ebank guarantee certificates and received Rs five crore as commission.

He was allegedly operating from Kuwait with the help of his accomplice who is yet to be traced. Among the 11 private companies, nine are based out of Bengaluru, he said. Police said two laptops, six mobile phones and 10 cheque books from different bank accounts have been recovered. *—PTI*

Cong will decide about making me CM in future: DKS

GOKARNA, 27 MARCH

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday said Congress will decide about making him the Chief Minister in future, bringing to the fore again the issue of leadership change. There was stiff competition between the present Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar for the post after the Assembly election results in May last year, and Congress had managed to convince the latter and made Shivakumar the Deputy Chief Minister. *—PTI*

Mandya: HDK's decision upsets Sumalatha

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy's decision to contest from Mandya Lok Sabha constituency has injected a new wave of political fervour into the region. Leaving behind his political bastion of Ramanagara, Kumaraswamy's move to contest from Mandya has sparked discussions about the shifting dynamics of power. The decision has left JD(S) activists in a dilemma of either prioritising their commitment to Mandya or giving up the political legacy of Ramanagara.

Kumaraswamy's candidacy from Mandya has ignited various political calculations and speculations. JD(S) workers view his entry into the race as a strategic move capable of challenging Congress candidate, Star Chandru, and strengthening the party in Mysuru region.

Kumaraswamy's presence on the ballot has infused enthusiasm among JD(S) supporters, who see his candidacy as a clear path to victory, given his significant fan base in Mandya. Attention has now turned to the response from sitting MP Sumalatha Ambarish. Amid speculation and anticipation, Sumalatha's next move remains uncertain.

While there are whispers of a potential meeting in Bengaluru to deliberate with her associates and supporters, the question of Sumalatha's alignment —whether she will extend support to Kumaraswamy or opt for an independent candidacy — continues to be a suspense. BJP high command's purported interest in Sumalatha adds another layer of intrigue to the unfolding political development, leaving room for unexpected twists and turns as the electoral saga unfolds. Salar News *—Salar News*

Shivarajkumar's films can't be barred: EC

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

The Election Commission (EC) has clarified that there is no imposition on displaying and screening of advertisements, movies, and billboards featuring Kannada actor Shivarajkumar.

In a letter to the poll body, the Karnataka State President of BJP OBC Morcha Wing and senior BJP leader R Raghu on 23 March stated the issue that if Shivarajkumar is screened then in a way he will promote his wife Geeta Shivarajkumar who is contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha elections from Shivamogga. In reply to that the Election Commission (EC) has clarified that it cannot impose a bar on commercial screenings.

Manoj Kumar Meena, Chief Electoral Officer for Karnataka, stated, "We can only ban the screening of films featuring actors who are contesting polls or campaigning on Doordarshan, which is run by public funds. Commercial screenings on TV channels and cinema theatres cannot be stopped." Additionally, Venkatesh Kumar R, Additional Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), noted that a similar complaint was lodged by Congress during the 2023 Karnataka Assembly elections against Kannada actor Sudeep, who was the BJP's star campaigner.

"We had made it clear then too that commercial screenings cannot be banned," he said. *—Salar News*

Shivarajkumar *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

- Karnataka State President of BJP OBC Morcha Wing and senior BJP leader R Raghu on 23 March stated the issue that if Shivarajkumar is screened then in a way he will promote his wife Geeta Shivarajkumar

State writes to Centre after TB drugs supply halted

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao has written to Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya seeking urgent supply of anti-TB drugs to the state.

He urged the Union Health Minister to instruct the officials concerned to supply the first-line anti-TB drugs on an urgent basis to the state.

In a letter to Mandaviya, he said there has been frequent interruption in the supply of anti-TB drugs to the State since 2021, and two recent communications from the Centre require the State to procure DSTB (Drug-Sensitive Tuberculosis) patient drugs for the next three months.

The second communication came after the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) had come into effect, it said.

Stressing that the State notifies more than 80,000 patients annually -- around 6,800 TB patients on a monthly basis, Rao said they have to be provided continuous treatment.

The state has intensified its efforts to procure anti-TB drugs both at the State level and district level.

The State has requested the Finance department to provide additional funds for procuring the drugs, the letter stated.

"However, it has been learnt that neither these medications are available in the quantities required by the State nor the procurement process can be hastened in view of both its manufacturing process as well as the prevailing MCC," the Minister said.

Rao further stated that he did not wish to accuse the Union government of callousness.

He, however, pointed out that state support for the TB patients has been jeopardised by this action of the Centre.

"Both the delayed communication to procure a critical drug (whose procurement is problematic in the short run) and also issuing the communication during MCC has adversely affected the efforts of the State government in this regard," he said.

—Salar News with Agencies

Congress candidate from Bengaluru Central Mansoor Ali Khan visits Shivajinagar with Housing Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan and Shivajinagar MLA Rizwan Arshad, in Bengaluru on Wednesday; Mansoor plays cricket at Gandhinagar constituency while Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao looks on *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Constitution under threat in BJP regime: Mansoor Ali Khan

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Constitution is under threat under BJP rule in the country and only Congress can safeguard it, said Congress candidate for Bengaluru Central constituency Mansoor Ali Khan on Wednesday.

Only Congress and Aam Aadmi Party are working to protect the Constitution, but now the latter is in danger under the BJP rule, Khan said during a meeting with party workers in Shivajinagar here. Housing Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan and Shivajinagar MLA Rizwan Arshad were among those present at the meeting. Congress-rules states such as Karnataka and Telangana are providing free bus rides to women and this is bringing significant changes to the lives of women. BJP and its allies are in power in 18 states in India and none of them is offering free bus rides for women, Mansoor said on the 'X' platform.

Zameer said, "Bengaluru Central has historically been a stronghold for Congress, and the people here are more concerned about development and progress rather than divisive issues like Hindu-Muslim conflicts."

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao took part in a public meeting of Mansoor in Gandhinagar on Wednesday. Rao said Mansoor will bring good developments in Bengaluru Central constituency. "Mansoor talks less and works more. I have been seeing his work since Yuva Congress era. As AICC Secretary incharge of Telangana Assembly elections 2023, he played a crucial role for party's victory," he said. *—Salar News*

WRITER GURULINGA KAPSE DIES AT 96

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

The literary community mourns the loss of Professor Gurulinga Kapse, a prominent figure in Kannada literature and a former chairman of Karnataka Sahitya Academy and writer who passed away after a prolonged illness on Tuesday night in Dharwad. He was 96.

In accordance with his wishes, his mortal remains will be donated to Dr Ramannavar Hospital in Bailhongal of Belagavi District. Born in BK Loni village in Vijayapura district, Kapse made significant contributions to Kannada literature, particularly in the realms of philosophy, spirituality, prose, and poetry. His expertise extended to both Kannada and Marathi, enabling him to translate literary works between the two languages.

In 2022, The Central Sahitya Acadamy awarded Kapse for his work 'Ondu Putada Kathe', a translation of Marathi writer VS Khandekar's 'Ek Panaachi Gosth' (an autobiography). Having served as a Professor of Kannada at Karnataka College in Dharwad, Kapse received recognition for his literary endeavours, including awards from the Karnataka Sahitya Academy and the State Nataka Academy. Kapse's legacy includes his dedication to promoting children's literature in Kannada and his notable translation work, for which he received accolades such as the Central Sahitya Academy's annual translation award. *—Salar News*

Gurulinga Kapse *PHOTO: SALAR*

AT HIS CITY HOME

Chiranjeevi gives tips to save water

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Amid the water crisis in Bengaluru, Telugu film star Chiranjeevi Konidela has emphasised the need to build houses that help conserve water, and shared details of what he has done at his farm house in the City.

By taking these steps, he said, one can conserve water and improve rainwater harvesting and build eco-friendly houses. "There may be a shortage of water in City today. Tomorrow it can happen anywhere. So I want to use this opportunity to emphasise the need to build houses that help conserve water. Here I am sharing what I did for my farmhouse in Bengaluru," Chiranjeevi said.

PHOTO:X/@KChiruTweets

Noting that recharge wells (in picture) that are 20-36 feet deep are installed at strategic points throughout the farm site with sufficient slopes to direct surface water flow to the recharge wells, he said, "Each well has a filter system, a silt trap with different aggregates- rock sizes and sand, to facilitate the passage of water through the layers." "A recharge well – compared to a recharge pit – can store more water and allow water to flow more slowly through porous layers in the substrate to reach deeper aquifers," he added. Further noting that he has also implemented "permaculture principles", the former Andhra Pradesh MP said Permaculture works on the circular principle of rejuvenating the environment, making it self-sustaining. *—PTI*

BJP's Annamalai, DMK's Dayanidhi file nominations

CHENNAI, 27 MARCH

Sitting DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran and state BJP chief K Annamalai on Wednesday filed their nominations for the 19 April Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu. Maran, who is seeking a successive term from the Chennai Central constituency, declared movable and immovable assets worth over Rs 7.81 crore. Annamalai is contesting from Coimbatore and he was accompanied by BJP Mahila Morcha chief and MLA Vanathi Sreenivasan among others, when he filed his nomination. In his election affidavit, senior DMK leader Maran submitted that he has Rs 7,81,05,240 of movable assets which include bank deposits and equity shares with private firms. The value of his immovable assets, stood at Rs 59,000. He said both he and his wife owe no dues to government banks and had nil liabilities. Pending cases against him included one filed by the CBI for allegedly using "telephone facilities above the entitlement" and having caused a loss of Rs 1.79 crore to BSNL and MTNL. *—PTI*

Mehbooba hails HM's statement on AFSPA

SRINAGAR, 27 MARCH

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday welcomed Home Minister Amit Shah's statement on considering revocation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from Jammu and Kashmir. As a first step, Central government can release journalists and Kashmiris languishing in jail "without any charges", she said. "PDP has consistently demanded the revocation of draconian AFSPA along with a gradual removal of troops. Better late than never but only if it isn't jumlebaazi like generating two crore jobs every year or empty promises of depositing Rs 15 lakh into bank accounts," she said in a post on X. Shah on Tuesday said the central government will consider revoking the AFSPA in Jammu and Kashmir. *—PTI*

Veteran Odisha Congress MLA's son joins BJD

BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH

Six-time Congress MLA Suresh Routray's son Manmath Routray joined the ruling BJD in Odisha on Wednesday. Manmath, a former commercial pilot, went to the BJD headquarters, Sankha Bhawan, with his supporters in a procession. He was inducted into the party by its MPs Manas Mangaraj and Sasmit Patra. "I will work for the ideology of my father and also Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. Both leaders have one agenda in life and that is development. I will work for the development of Odisha," he said. Suresh had on Tuesday said that he wanted his son to contest elections as a Congress candidate. Stating that he would not contest the ensuing polls due to his age, the 80-year-old leader said he would, however, cast his vote in favour of the Congress candidate and not to his son, who is likely to be fielded by the BJD. Manmath said he has his father's "blessings". *—PTI*

Sena leader Shivajirao Patil joins NCP

PUNE, 27 MARCH

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Tuesday declared the candidature of Shivajirao Adhalrao Patil from Shirur Lok Sabha seat after the Shiv Sena leader joined NCP. Patil will be the candidate of the tripartite Mahayuti alliance. Pawar has also announced the candidature of sitting NCP MP Sunil Tatkare from Raigad. Patil joined the Ajit -led NCP at a party congregation held in Pune. Pawar appealed to NCP workers to ensure Patil's victory against actor-turned-politician and sitting MP from Shirur, Amol Kolhe, who belongs to the Sharad Pawar camp. *—PTI*

EC issues showcause notice to Dilip, Supriya

They made comments against Didi, Kangana

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday slapped showcause notices on BJP leader Dilip Ghosh and Congress leader Supriya Shrinate for their offensive remarks against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Kangana Ranaut respectively.

Ranaut has been fielded by BJP from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi Lok Sabha seat for the Parliamentary elections.

Their remarks were "undignified and in bad taste", EC said.

The poll panel said that prima facie, the two remarks were violative of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and it's advisory to political parties to maintain dignity during electioneering.

The two leaders have been asked to respond to the showcause notices by 29 March evening.

EC took action against Shrinate following a complaint by the BJP that alleged she had posted a picture of Ranaut along with "derogatory remarks" on X.

According to the English translation of Ghosh's remark, he had said: "When Didi goes to Goa, she becomes Goa's daughter, in Tripura, she says I am Tripura's daughter, decide who is your father, this is not right".

Dilip Ghosh and Supriya Shrinate *PHOTO: PTI*

EC said on careful examination, the comment has been found to be offensive, insulting and prima facie, violative of the provisions of the MCC and the commission's advisory issued earlier this month.

The poll authority reminded the two leaders of the provision of MCC which states that criticism of other political parties, when made, shall be confined to their policies and programme, past record and work.

Ghosh however on Wednesday apologised for his remarks on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee that triggered a massive controversy.

The apology came hours after BJP sought an explanation from Ghosh, who was heard mocking the family background of Banerjee in a purported video clip.

Maintaining that his party and other people have reservations about his choice of words, Ghosh said, "If it is so, I am sorry for that." Ghosh, clarified that he harbours no personal animosity towards the Chief Minister. *—PTI*

BJD PICKS 15 FOR LS, 72 FOR ASSEMBLY POLLS

BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday declared the names of 15 candidates for the Lok Sabha and 72 nominees for the Odisha Assembly elections.

Patnaik himself will contest from the Hinjili Assembly segment in Ganjam district.

BJD's second list of six candidates for the Lok Sabha seats came barely two hours after Patnaik through a video message, announced the first list of nine Lok Sabha candidates and 72 nominees for the Odisha Assembly election.

In the second list, former Mumbai Police Commissioner Arup Patnaik has been fielded from Puri Lok Sabha seat against BJP's Sambit Patra, while Santrupt Mishra will contest from Cuttack seat.

Patnaik re-nominated three sitting MPs - Sarmistha Sethi (Jajpur), Rajashree Mallick (Jagatsinghpur), and Achyuta Samanta (Kandhamal).

The BJD has dropped six sitting MPs. Of the 15 Lok Sabha candidates, four are women. Of the 72 Assembly candidates, 13 were new faces and 12 were women candidates.

Odisha has 21 Lok Sabha seats and 147 Assembly constituencies. Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly elections will be held simultaneously in four phases 13, 20, 25 May and 1 June. *—PTI*

Have plan to beat joblessness: Cong

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

- Mallikarjun Kharge cited that the ILO report says that 83 per cent of jobless Indians are youths and only 17.5 per cent of the youth in rural areas are engaged in regular work

Attacking Centre over the issue of unemployment, Congress on Wednesday claimed the country is sitting on a "ticking bomb" of joblessness with the youth bearing the brunt of Modi government's "apathy" and asserted that it has a concrete plan for providing jobs to them.

Citing India Employment Report 2024 released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute of Human Development (IHD), Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge urged people to remember before voting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to provide 20 crore jobs in 10 years but "snatched more than 12 crore jobs from the youth".

"Our Youth is bearing the brunt of Modi government's pathetic apathy, as ever-rising Unemployment has destroyed their future. ILO & IHD Report conclusively says that the Unemployment problem is grim in India," he said.

Kharge cited that the ILO report says that 83 per cent of jobless Indians are youths and only 17.5 per cent of the youth in rural areas are engaged in regular work.

Compared to 2012, youth unemployment has tripled under the Modi government, he claimed.

Kharge listed the guarantees of the Congress under 'Yuva Nyay', such as filling up nearly 30 lakh vacant central government posts.

Congress leader P Chidambaram also attacked the BJP-led central government over Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran's reported remarks that the government cannot solve all social and economic problems. The former finance minister asserted that his party has a concrete plan to tackle unemployment which will be revealed in its manifesto.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also slammed Centre over the issue of unemployment, saying the youth have understood that BJP cannot provide employment and her party has a concrete plan for providing jobs to them.

Congress has been attacking the government on issues of price rise and unemployment and has held it responsible for people's problems. *—PTI*

FEMA: ED summons Mahua, Hiranandani

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Enforcement Directorate has issued fresh summons to TMC leader Mahua Moitra and Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani for questioning in a Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) contravention case on 28 March, official sources said on Wednesday.

The 49-year-old Trinamool Congress leader was called for questioning twice earlier by the central agency but she did not depose citing official work and sought deferment of the notice.

Moitra and Hiranandani have been asked to appear for questioning at ED office on Thursday.

Hiranandani was also summoned by the agency in a separate FEMA case against his Mumbai-based realty group. Earlier, his father Niranjan Hiranandani had deposed before the ED in Mumbai.

In the current case, the sources said, an advocate allegedly linked to Moitra was examined by the ED on Wednesday at its office.

Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha in December for "unethical conduct", has been renominated by her party from West Bengal's Krishnanagar seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had raided her premises in connection with the cash-for-query case on Saturday, days after anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal directed the federal agency to investigate the allegations levelled against her by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey.

Dubey, a Lok Sabha member, has alleged that Moitra asked questions in the House in exchange for cash and gifts from Hiranandani to mount an attack on industrialist Gautam Adani and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, among others.

Transactions linked to a non-resident external (NRE) account are under ED's scanner, apart from a few other foreign remittances and fund transfers, the sources said.

Moitra has denied any wrongdoing and claims that she is being targeted as she raised questions about deals of the Adani Group. *—PTI*

Ex-Union ministers Geete, Sawant in Sena's (UBT) 1st list

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

Shiv Sena (UBT), a constituent of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), on Wednesday released its first list of 17 candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra, and said it will contest a total of 22 seats in the state.

It nominated former Union ministers Anant Geete and Arvind Sawant from Raigad and South Mumbai constituencies respectively.

It re-nominated all five sitting Lok Sabha MPs, who stayed with party chief Uddhav Thackeray, following the outfit's split in 2022. These lawmakers are Arvind Sawant (South Mumbai), Rajan Vichare (Thane), Vinayak Raut (Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg), Omraje Nimbalkar (Dharashiv) and Sanjay Jadhav (Parbhani).It also fielded its Rajya Sabha member Anil Desai from Mumbai South-Central, party leader Sanjay Raut said. With this, the party has fielded four candidates from Mumbai *—PTI*

WB: PM VOWS TO RETURN 'LOOTED' FUNDS TO POOR

PHOTO: PTI

KOLKATA, 27 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday that he is working to ensure that nearly Rs 3,000 crore "looted" from poor people in West Bengal and attached by Enforcement Directorate is returned to them.

Modi made this assertion in a telephonic conversation with Amrita Roy, a member of erstwhile royalty and BJP candidate against TMC's Mahua Moitra in Krishnanagar Lok Sabha constituency, and claimed that power and not country is the priority of Opposition parties.

"PM Modi told 'Rajmata' Amrita Roy that he is exploring legal options to ensure that the money looted from the poor goes back to them through whatever assets and money the ED has attached from the corrupt," a BJP leader said.

According to the details of the conversation shared by the party, Modi put the amount of money, which was paid by people in the state as bribe for getting jobs, at Rs 3,000 crore.

Modi also took a swipe at Congress for its support to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal following his arrest by ED in a corruption case, saying those who made complaint against AAP have now changed track to help it. He, though, did not name anyone.

The alleged corruption of the state's ruling Trinamool Congress leaders is one of the main planks of BJP in the state. *—PTI*

ED files money-laundering case against Kerala CM's daughter and her IT firm

KOCHI, 27 MARCH

Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a money-laundering case to probe charges that a Kochi-based private firm made illegal payments to an IT company owned by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter Veena Vijayan and some others, official sources said on Wednesday.

The federal agency has registered the case under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and is expected to summon the alleged beneficiaries of these funds and others involved, the sources said.

ED case has been booked after taking cognisance of a complaint filed by Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), an investigative arm of the Union corporate affairs ministry, they added.

Veena Vijayan *PHOTO: ANI*

The case came to light after the income-tax department found that Cochin Minerals and Rutile Limited (CMRL) made an alleged illegal payment of Rs 1.72 crore to Veena Vijayan's company -- Exalogic Solutions -- in 2018 and 2019, even though the information technology (IT) firm had not provided any service to the private company.

Karnataka High Court last month dismissed a plea filed by Exalogic Solutions against the probe initiated by SFIO.

According to reports quoting Income Tax Interim Board for Settlement, the Kochi-based company previously had an agreement with Veena Vijayan's firm for consultancy and software support services.

Even though no service was rendered by Veena Vijayan's firm, the amount was paid on a monthly basis "due to her relationship with a prominent person", the reports have claimed, citing the deposition of the minerals company authorities before the income-tax department.

However, Chief Minister has rubbished the charges, saying they were made to tarnish his image and defame him. *—PTI*

POLITICAL SWITCH

AAP's lone MP Sushil Rinku joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

In a setback to the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, it's Member of Parliament from Jalandhar, Sushil Kumar Rinku and Jalandhar West MLA Sheetal Angural joined BJP on Wednesday.

Welcoming the two legislators to BJP, Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the BJP is the largest political party in the world and people from different walks of life are joining it.

"I have taken this decision for the development of Jalandhar. We will take Jalandhar forward. We will bring all the projects of the Central Government to Jalandhar," he said.

Rinku also alleged that no development work has been done in Punjab by the AAP government.

Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, felicitate Aam Aadmi Party's MP Sushil Kumar Rinku and MLA Sheetal Angural on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

"No development work has been done in Punjab by the AAP government. On the other hand, I am impressed by the developmental work initiated by PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. Aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also helped me a lot in the developmental work I have done in the Jalandhar constituency," Rinku said.

Angural put out a statement saying that he has resigned from all the responsibilities he had in the AAP.

Rinku is joining the BJP despite being announced as the AAP candidate from Jalandhar. *—ANI*

OUT OF 222 BILLS

LS passed 45 bills the day they were tabled

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

A total of 222 bills were passed in the 17th Lok Sabha and 45 of these were cleared the same day they were introduced in the House, said Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report.

Some of these bills are The Appropriation (Vote on Account) Bill, The Appropriation Bill, The Jammu and Kashmir Appropriation (No.2) Bill, The Central Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023 and The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

The analysis conducted by ADR and National Election Watch (NEW released on Tuesda, sheds light on the performance of the 17th Lok Sabha and its members.

According to the report, 222 of 240 bills were introduced in 17th Lok Sabha were passed.

222 of 240 bills were introduced in 17th Lok Sabha were passed *PHOTO: PTI*

Additionally, 11 bills were withdrawn and six are pending. Only one bill received the President's assent.On average, an MP asked 165 questions and attended 189 of the 273 sittings.Chhattisgarh MPs had the highest average attendance, with 11 from the state attending 216 of the 273 sittings.Conversely, Arunachal Pradesh had the lowest average attendance, with two MPs attending only 127 sittings.

MPs from Maharashtra were the most vocal, with 49 representatives asking 315 questions each on average. In contrast, Manipur MPs asked 25 questions each on average.

Among parties, NCP stood out with five of its MPs raising an average of 410 questions each. On the other hand, two Apna Dal (Soneylal) raised only five questions each.

TDP MPs attended 229 of the 273 sittings on average. AAP MPs had the lowest attendance with only 57 sittings.

The report also names 10 MPs who participated actively in parliamentary proceedings, posing the highest number of questions.

BJP's Balurghat MP Sukanta Majumdar, with 596 questions topped the list.

The majority of the questions revolved around health and family welfare, agriculture and farmers welfare, and railways, according to the report. *—PTI*

MY HUSBAND WILL REVEAL TRUTH IN COURT: ARVIND KEJRIWAL'S WIFE

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The wife of jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Sunita on Wednesday said that her husband, who is in the custody of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the alleged excise scam, will reveal the truth regarding the case in court on 28 March.

In a video message, Sunita Kejriwal hit out at Centre and central probe agency, saying that ED could not find a single penny in its more than 250 raids conducted in the "so-called liquor scam".

Kejriwal was arrested on 21 March for alleged misdoings in the now-scrapped Delhi Excise policy case under an ongoing money laundering probe by the ED.

The case relates to alleged irregularities and money laundering in the formulation and execution of Delhi excise policy in 2022. *—ANI*

Kejri's health deteriorated in custody: AAP

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The blood sugar level of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is diabetic, is fluctuating and his health has deteriorated in Enforcement Directorate custody, AAP sources claimed on Wednesday. Arvind Kejriwal's blood sugar level dropped to 46 Mg at one point in time and according to doctors, such a drop is "very dangerous", they claimed. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

2 Chinese held in UP for illegally entering India

SIDDHARTHNAGAR, 27 MARCH

Two Chinese nationals were arrested at Siddharthnagar's Kakrahwa post on the Indo-Nepal border after they were intercepted entering Uttar Pradesh illegally earlier yesterday. The man was identified as Zhou Pulin, a native of Sichuan in China, while the woman was identified as Yuan Yuhan, a native of Chongqing in China. The police also recovered two Chinese passports, a tourist visa for Nepal, mobile phones, two Chinese SIM cards and a total of nine cards of different types in two small bags. According to an official press note, "Two Chinese nationals (one woman and one man) were arrested while entering India illegally on 26 March, 2024. Further details on the matter are awaited.—*ANI*

Man kills cousin during Holi party in Jharkhand

MEDININAGAR, 27 MARCH

A man was allegedly shot dead by his cousin at a Holi party in Jharkhand's Palamu district, police said on Wednesday. The incident happened at Kalyanpur village in Chainpur police station area on Tuesday night during a party organised by their family. A fight broke out between the two cousins, identified as Ajay Chaudhary and Manoj Chaudhary, during the party, Medininagar SDPO Manibhusan Prasad said. "Ajay first attacked Manoj with a scissor, and then took out a pistol and shot him twice. Manoj was taken to the Medinirai Medical College and Hospital where doctors declared him dead," he said. Ajay is missing following the incident, he added. Manoj had a criminal background and was wanted in eight cases, including that of a roadside robbery, police said.—*PTI*

Son objects to dad's loud phone call, killed

NAGPUR, 27 MARCH

A man allegedly killed his 28-year-old son following a heated argument between them over speaking loudly on a phone at a village in Maharashtra's Nagpur district, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place at Pipra village, around 30 km from Nagpur city, on Monday, and the victim died during treatment at a hospital the next day, an official said. The accused, Ramrao Kakde, was arrested following the incident, he said. "Kakde hit his son, Suraj, with a steel rod following a heated argument after the latter objected to his loud phone conversation. Suraj was admitted to a hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries on Tuesday," the official of Bela police station said. According to police, the father-son duo was under the influence of liquor when the incident took place.—*PTI*

Delhi youth shot dead, probe underway

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

A youth succumbed to his injuries after being allegedly shot in the National Capital while he was riding a motorcycle, police said. The deceased has been identified as Sanjay,32, a resident of New Usmanpur. He runs a restaurant. Nitin Singh, 27, the brother of the deceased, filed a police complaint, following which the police filed a case at the New Usmanpur police station, as per police. "The deceased was riding a motorcycle at the time of the incident," police said. The alleged murder took place on the intervening night of 26-27 March, near Hanuman Mandir Wali Gali service road, New Usmanpur.
—*ANI*

EAM talks bilateral ties with Malaysia PM

EAM is in Kuala Lumpur on last leg of tour

KUALA LUMPUR, 27 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday called on Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and appreciated his vision for stronger bilateral ties, asserting that it would help craft a more "ambitious agenda" for the India-Malaysia relationship.

Jaishankar is in Kuala Lumpur on the third and last leg of his three-nation tour to Singapore, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Praising the Malaysian Prime Minister's vision for a stronger bilateral relationship, he said, "His vision for stronger India-Malaysia ties, both in traditional and new-age areas, will help us craft a more ambitious agenda for the relationship."

Earlier, Jaishankar met his Malaysian counterpart Mohamad bin Haji Hasan.

The two foreign ministers held a "productive and frank discussion, including exchanging views on the multifaceted dimensions of Malaysia-India bilateral affairs as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest," the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in an official statement.

Jaishankar said that he looks forward to further strengthening engagements as the two countries near the completion of a decade of Enhanced Strategic Partnership.

The ministers also discussed the exchange of high-level visits and the convening of the 7th Joint Commission Meeting of Malaysia and India on a mutually agreeable date.

This was the first meeting between Jaishankar and Hasan since the latter took office in December 2023, the statement said.

Jaishankar is also scheduled to meet Minister of Digital Gobind Singh Deo, the foreign ministry here said.

His visit aims to strengthen cooperation between India and Malaysia and enhance understanding of shared challenges and opportunities, it said.

Malaysia and India share a long-standing and substantive relationship bound by robust economic partnerships and close people-to-people ties. —*PTI*

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Prime Minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim during a meeting, in Malaysia, on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

AFTER MAJOR SEARCH OP

'Missing' daughter of Nepal mayor found after 2 days in Goa

PANAJI, 27 MARCH

Two days after the 36-year-old daughter of a mayor in Nepal was reported missing from Goa, she was traced to a hotel in the coastal state on Wednesday, police said.

The woman, Aarti Hamal, was found at the hotel located at Chopdem village in North Goa, around 20 km away from where she went missing on 25 March, they said.

"Hamal was reported missing from the Osho meditation centre near Mandrem in North Goa, where she arrived from Nepal a month back. The management of the centre had lodged a missing person's complaint at Mandrem police station," a senior police official said.

Before going missing, the woman was last seen at Siolim (North Goa) on 25 March, he said.

"A massive search operation was launched across the state to trace her," the official said, adding that the eyewitnesses claimed that she was very much in her senses when they last saw her.

Police had also started looking for her at another Osho centre in the state located at Canacona, he added.

"She has been frequently visiting Goa. She had left her phone back at the Osho centre, due to which she could not be traced with the help of technical surveillance," he said.

The state police had started searching all the hotels in and around Pernem and Mandrem areas of North Goa, the official said.

"On Wednesday, Hamal was found in a hotel at Chopdem village along with two other women, who are her friends," he said.

The police are in the process of recording her statement, the official said, adding that her family members have arrived in the state.

Her father had earlier released a post on social media seeking help from the people to trace her. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FB

PHOTO: PTI

CH'GARH: 6 NAXALITES KILLED IN ENCOUNTER

BIJAPUR, 27 MARCH

Six Naxalites, including two women cadres, were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Wednesday, a police official said.

The gunfight took place in the forest area located along the Talperu river near Chipurbhatti village under Basaguda police station area, when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P told PTI.

The operation involving personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and its elite unit CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), was launched based on inputs about the presence of Naxalites from People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) platoon no. 10 of Maoists, he said.

"After the exchange of fire stopped, bodies of six Naxalites, including two women, and a huge cache of weapons and explosives were recovered from the spot", the IG said. —*PTI*

India releases second tranche of ₹500 cr to Bhutan

THIMPU, 27 MARCH

- Second tranche was handed over by India's Ambassador to Bhutan Sudhakar Dalela to Bhutan's Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Lyonpo DN Dhungyel

India has released the second tranche of Rs 500 crore to Bhutan for the development of infrastructure related to the GyalSung Project.

This comes less than a week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 23 March concluded a fruitful two-day state visit to Bhutan during which he assured Thimphu of New Delhi's firm support in its quest for development and agreed to provide Rs 10,000 crore to the Himalayan nation over the next five years.

The second tranche was handed over by India's Ambassador to Bhutan Sudhakar Dalela to Bhutan's Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Lyonpo DN Dhungyel.

The first tranche of Rs 500 crore was released on January 28 earlier this year.

"India is privileged to partner with Bhutan on a landmark initiative of His Majesty the King of Bhutan, which puts the youth and skilling at the heart of nation-building endeavours," a statement from the Indian Embassy here said on Tuesday.

With this, the Government of India has released a total of Rs 1,000 crore to the Government of Bhutan under the Memorandum of Understanding on the concessionary financing arrangements for the GyalSung Infrastructure Project, the statement said.

The MoU, signed in January 2024, provides a framework for the disbursal of Rs 1,500 crore as concessionary financing to the Government of Bhutan for infrastructure development related to the GyalSung academies —*PTI*

Wild boar kills 1, prohibitory orders imposed in J'khand dist

SIMDEGA, 27 MARCH

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPc were imposed in a panchayat in Jharkhand's Simdega district after a wild boar killed one person and injured nine others, an official said on Wednesday.

The incident took place in Pithra panchayat, around 140 km from Ranchi, when villagers were preparing to celebrate Holi on Tuesday morning.

"A wild boar attacked the gathering, killing one person and injuring six others. Later it caused injuries to three more people," Forest Range Officer SS Chaudhary said.

A gathering of five or more people has been prohibited under the order. Besides, villagers have been asked not to use loudspeakers or carry weapons or arms.Meanwhile, forest department teams have been deployed since Wednesday morning to trace the boar and drive it to the forest.Chaudhary said there was a possibility that the villagers might have injured the wild boar and it turned aggressive, attacking people.Out of the nine injured, four have been referred to Ranchi's Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), while four are undergoing treatment at Sadar Hospital in Simdega. One injured has been discharged from the hospital, the forest official said.Chaudhary said the next of kin of the deceased was provided Rs 10,000 as immediate relief, while the injured were given Rs 5,000 each. —*PTI*

AFTER A QUARREL

Woman paraded nude, beaten up in MP; 4 women arrested

INDORE, 27 MARCH

Four women were arrested for allegedly beating up, stripping and parading a 30-year-old woman over a dispute at a village in Madhya Pradesh's Indore district , police said on Wednesday.

A video of the purported incident that occurred during the Holi celebrations also surfaced on social media.

"On Monday, four women forcibly pulled the victim out of her house, beat her up and humiliated her by stripping her naked in public at Bachhora village of Gautampura police station area," Superintendent of Police (Rural) Sunil Mehta said.All four accused women were later arrested, he said.

One of the accused suspected that the victim was instigating her mother-in-law against her. She also suspected that the victim had taken her mother-in-law to Mandsaur without informing her, the police official said. The victim and the accused women belong to the Scheduled Caste (SC) category, he added. According to him, some onlookers in the village shot the video of the humiliating act and circulated it.

These people are being identified and appropriate legal steps will be taken against them, he said.

They said that the victim woman kept pleading for mercy at the time of the incident, but the accused did not relent and they openly stripped her by tearing her clothes. —*PTI*

A video of the purported incident that occurred during the Holi celebrations also surfaced on social media PHOTO: PIXABAY

MUNAWAR DETAINED IN HOOKAH BAR

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

Stand-up comedian and 'Bigg Boss - 17' winner Munawar Faruqui was among 14 people detained by the Mumbai police after they were found smoking hookahs during a raid in south Mumbai, an official said on Wednesday.

The Social Service branch of the city police conducted the raid at a hookah parlour located in Bora Bazar area of Fort around 10.30 pm on Tuesday, and the operation continued till 5 am of Wednesday, an official said.

"During the raid, the police found stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui and others smoking hookahs at the joint. We also have a video of their act." a senior police official said.

Police had received information that some patrons were smoking tobacco-based hookahs at the parlour in the guise of smoking herbal hookahs, he said. —*PTI*

KOTA STUDENT'S SUICIDE

'Anti-suicide unit could have saved my son'

KOTA, 27 MARCH

The father of a NEET aspirant who hanged himself at his rented accommodation here has accused negligence on the part of the PG's owner and management for not installing an "anti-suicide" device on the fan.

The body of 20-year-old Mohammad Urooj, a native of Uttar Pradesh's Kannauj, was handed over to his family on Wednesday morning after conducting a post-mortem, Station House Office (SHO) Satish Chaudhary said.

A case has been registered in the matter on the complaint of Urooj's father Sabir Khan, he said, adding that further probe is underway to ascertain the reason behind the student's extreme step.

Chaudhary on Tuesday said the ceiling fan in Urooj's room was not equipped with an anti-suicide device.

Khan, while talking to reporters outside the mortuary, said that he holds the PG owner and management responsible for his son's death.

He said that his son was good at studies and it was "negligence" of the PG owner and management that the fan in Urooj's room was not equipped with an anti-suicide device.

If they had installed the device as per norms and guidelines, Urooj could have been saved, Khan said.

An anti-suicide device is a spring-like structure which is attached to the ceiling fans. When an object weighing more than 20 kilos is hung from the fan, the spring attached to it expands, making it impossible for someone to commit suicide by this method. Simultaneously, a siren goes off.

Urooj's father said that they spoke to him on Monday night and he did not appear to be distressed.

Chaudhary said appropriate action will be taken against the PG owner for non-compliance with the guidelines.

A love affair angle is also being verified, he said, adding that no suicide note was recovered from Urooj's room.

This is the sixth case of suicide by a coaching student in Kota since January.

The number of student suicides in Kota stood at 26 in 2023.

If you are in Karnataka, If you need emotional support, please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777.

—*PTI*

The number of student suicides in Kota stood at 26 in 2023 PHOTO: PTI

'Two Kerala youths forced into war will return soon'

T'PURAM, 27 MARCH

Two of the four Kerala-based youths who fought in the war against Ukraine after being recruited into the Russian army by private agencies will soon return home to their families, Union Minister of State (Mos) for External Affairs V Muraleedharan has said.

The MoS said on Tuesday evening that the Indian Embassy was readying their travel documents to return from Russia.

"We expect that they will soon return home," Muraleedharan, who is contesting from the Attingal Lok Sabha constituency in the upcoming 2024 general elections, told reporters.

Regarding the remaining two residents of the state, the MoS said the External Affairs Ministry was in talks with the Russian government to bring them back as well.

"Rest assured we are taking strong measures to ensure their return," he said.

According to the relatives of the three men, he said that they were taken to Russia by a recruitment agency with the promise of a whopping salary of Rs 2.5 lakh.

Earlier, Muraleedharan had said that authorities have launched an investigation into agencies that recruited Indians to go to war-torn Ukraine after luring them with the promise of lucrative jobs in Russia.

He had also said that the Central government was taking all possible efforts to bring back all Indians stranded in the conflict zone, and procedures are underway to take legal action against the agencies that recruited them. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- Regarding the remaining two residents of the state, the MoS said the External Affairs Ministry was in talks with the Russian government to bring them back as well."Rest assured we are taking strong measures to ensure their return," he said

HUNGER STRIKE ENDS

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk is under observation at a hospital after he ended his 21-day hunger strike in support of the demand for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution on Tuesday
PHOTO:PTI

Why are Rohingyas fleeing refugee camps by boats?

This tragedy isn't an isolated incident. The number of Rohingya people trying to escape refugee camps by boat has skyrocketed in recent months.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 1,783 Rohingya refugees boarded boats from Bangladesh from January to 1 October, 2023. Since then, around 3,100 people have embarked on these treacherous journeys – an increase of nearly 74 per cent

Since January 2023, around 490 Rohingya have been reported dead or missing, including 280 since 1 October.

Their attempts to reach countries like Malaysia and most recently Indonesia are being met with refusals and pushbacks, leaving many Rohingya stranded at sea and vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking and even death.

Why are so many Rohingya trying to flee in recent months? And how should the international community respond to this increasingly desperate humanitarian crisis?

There are 1 million Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh, 490 reported or missing since Janurary 2023 to October 2023
PHOTO: X/ @ANDREASHARSONO

Living with constant tension

The nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees now living in Bangladesh are survivors of a massive Myanmar military operation in 2017 aimed at driving them from their homes in western Rakhine state.

Even before they were forced across the border, the Rohingya people had been subjected to decades of discrimination, denial of citizenship, exclusion from schools and work, restrictions on freedom of movement and violence from authorities.

In 2019, we conducted on-the-ground interviews with 27 Rohingya community experts living in Cox's Bazaar, including teachers, mothers, religious leaders, spiritual healers, youths and activists.

We wanted to know how Rohingya people understand and describe the psychological impacts of genocide and displacement.

This understanding is important because most mental health services are based on Western terminology like "depression", "anxiety" or "stress". But these may not properly fit the Rohingya experience.

Instead, we found the English word "tension" (in Rohingya, sinta) was used by many refugees, which conveys feelings of worry, concern and anxiety and captures the experience of being stateless.After conducting our interviews, we then developed a pictorial model of "tension", as Rohingya is an oral language.

The model (below) showed how being "opportunity-less" – from lack of work, education or freedom of movement – sits at the centre of tension.

Our interview subjects told us lack of opportunity leads to thinking too much, pain in the body and conflict in the family, between families and with the Bangladeshi community.

Why the situation has become even more dire

The six Rohingya activists who helped us to conduct this research have since described to us how these sources of tension have worsened since 2019.

Like so many in their communities, they have personally experienced arbitrary arrest, fabricated legal cases and imprisonment by the Bangladeshi authorities.

The camps are also fenced off, like open-air prisons. This means the refugees are trapped when fires break out, which happens frequently. In January, a huge fire spread quickly in the congested encampments, destroying some 800 shelters and leaving 7,000 people homeless.

And with civil war raging inside Myanmar across the border, some Rohingya in Bangladesh have even been killed by stray mortar shells.

Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated and poorest countries in the world, cannot address these push factors in the camps without support. International aid for the Rohingya, meanwhile, continues to rapidly decline.

What Australia and regional partners should do?

What can – and should – the international community do to find a durable solution to this problem?

As a well-resourced regional partner, Australia can play a much bigger humanitarian role not focused solely on punishing people smugglers or the refugees themselves through boat turnbacks.

As recent refugee boat arrivals in Australia and Indonesia demonstrate, boat turnbacks and arrests fail to address the root causes of forced migration. They do not "stop the boats".

—The Conversation

SALAR ساہر

EC is on a mission to ensure no voters are left behind

Traversing jungles and snow-capped mountains, wading through rivers with life jackets on, trekking for miles and carrying EVMS on horseback and on elephants, Election Commission teams reach the remotest corner and the most inaccessible spot to ensure no voter is left out.

Fanning out across the length and breadth of India, right from the world's highest polling station at 15,000 feet above sea level to a booth in a shipping container in an islet, the EC could well be moving mountains to conduct elections in the world's largest democracy.

In the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, 94 special polling booths will be set up for internally-displaced persons of Manipur to vote at relief camps. Ethnic clashes between the Meitei and tribal Kuki communities in Manipur since May last year have resulted in the loss of over 200 lives.

Over 50,000 displaced people will be eligible to vote at these booths which will be set up in or near relief camps.

In Meghalaya, polling personnel had to wear life jackets and were accompanied by divers to a riverine polling station in Kamsing village in West Jaintia Hills district.

According to "Leap of Faith" a book on polls published by the EC, a special polling station has been set up in Banej, tucked deep in the forests of Gir since 2007 for just one voter - Mahant Haridasji Udaseen. He is a priest at a Shiva temple located in the area.

A booth is set up in the forest office near the temple. A dedicated polling team is appointed to set up the booth and make necessary arrangements for the lone voter to exercise his right.

"The Baneshwar Mahadev Temple is located deep inside Gir forest, the last surviving natural habitat of Asiatic lions. Political parties do not canvass in the area for fear of wild animals. The polling team comprising 10 persons travelled 25 km to set up a booth for a single voter.

"Haridas Udaseen is the successor of Mahant Bharatdas Darshandas, who was the sole voter in the polling station for nearly two decades, before he passed away in November, 2019," the book reads.

In another hamlet with just one voter in Malogam in Arunachal Pradesh, election workers travelled 300 miles over four days across winding mountain roads and river valleys in 2019. Malogam is a remote hamlet in forested mountains in Arunachal Pradesh, close to the border with China.

Polling stations have also been set up for the Siddis, descendants of East Africans who came to India between the 14th and 17th centuries, in the Talala area of Gir Somnath district. There are over 3,500 such voters in the area, as per the official data.

Off the country's east coast, in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the EC teams braved crocodile swamps for nine voters in 2019.

Gujarat has 1,600 km of coastline, the longest for any Indian state. The seascape is dotted with islets, a number of which are inhabited.

EC facilitated voting for the first time in the islets in 2022, obviating the need for electors to travel to mainland. At Aliabet, in Bharuch district, a polling station was set up in a shipping container. With minimum facilities assured for 217 electors, they were spared travelling for more than 80 km to vote in the nearest polling station in Bharuch.

The Election Commission in 2022 decided to double the honorarium of polling officials, who have to proceed for election duty over three days in advance to reach the polling stations located in remote and difficult areas.

Previously their honorarium was on par with others.

The decision came in the aftermath of CEC Kumar's visit to Dumak and Kalgoth villages in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand.

"He trekked eight kilometres in three days to reach the polling stations part of Badrinath constituency, which went to polls in 2022. While recognising the courage and determination of polling officials, he stressed on the necessity of having updated route maps indicating the safest and shortest course," an EC official said.

In 2022, the EC had also directed to provide special water and shockproof backpacks to carry EVMs to aid hands free movement p olling parties in difficult terrains.

—PTI

Right from the world's highest polling station at 15,000 feet above sea level to a booth in a shipping container in an islet, EC could be moving mountains to conduct elections ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

Cyber-attacks linked to Chinese spy agencies are increasing

Cyber-attacks linked to Chinese intelligence agencies are increasing in capability and frequency as they seek to test foreign government responses, analysts have warned in the wake of revelations about a mass hacking of UK data.

On Tuesday, the UK and US governments accused hacking group Advanced Persistent Threat 31 (APT 31), backed by China's government spy agency, of conducting a years-long cyber-attack campaign, targeting politicians, national security officials, journalists and businesses. The UK said the hackers had potentially gained access to information on tens of millions of UK voters held by the Electoral Commission, as well as for cyber-espionage targeting lawmakers who have been outspoken about threats from China.

Both the US and UK governments announced sanctions against linked Chinese companies and individuals.

Also on Tuesday, the New Zealand government said it had raised concerns with the Chinese government about its involvement in an attack which targeted the country's parliamentary entities in 2021.

Analysts told that there were clear signs of an increase in cyber-attacks which appeared to be conducted by Chinese actors, often with links to China's intelligence agencies and government.

"Some of the hacking groups are information security firms contracted to Chinese intelligence units to carry out attacks on specific targets, such as the recent case of iSoon Information," said analyst Chung Che, from Taiwan-based cyber threat analysis firm T5.

T5 had monitored an increase in "constantly evolving" hacking efforts by Chinese groups in the Pacific region and Taiwan over the last three years.

"We believe that their purpose is to infiltrate specific targets and steal important information and intelligence, whether it be political, military or commercial," Chung said.

Chung said there was not sufficient information to specifically trace the activity all the way to China's top leadership (and Beijing resolutely rejects the allegations), but "given China's system of no distinction between party and state, it is true that we cannot rule out the possibility of instructions coming from the top".

Several analysts said western governments, however, have become much more willing to name China as the perpetrator, after years of avoiding antagonising the leaders of the world's second largest economy.

Analysts said that there were clear signs of an increase in cyber attacks which appeared to be conducted by China's intelligence agencies and government ***PHOTO:PIXABAY***

"That earlier reticence to criticise has given way to a more vocal stance and I think that's probably because the scale of the threat and the actual intrusions has risen. They are more serious threats now," said David Tuffley, a senior lecturer in cybersecurity at Griffith University in Australia.

The UK announcement followed revelations last month that a Chinese hacking network known as Volt Typhoon had been lying dormant inside US critical infrastructure for as long as five years, "pre-positioning" itself for future acts of sabotage. That operation sparked alarm among Five Eyes observers as it indicated a shift away from intelligence-gathering espionage towards warfare preparation.

Tuffley said cyber-attacks

- UK and US governments accused China government's spy agents of conducting years long cyber attack campaigns, targeting politicians, national security officials, journalists and businesses.

were part of China's greyzone activity – meaning acts that approach but do not reach the threshold of warfare. Much of the activity is regionally focused, targeting Taiwan and other countries disputing claims in the South China Sea. But these cyberattacks had a far broader reach.

"The whole point to make about all of this is that China is obviously adopting a much more muscular stance," said Tuffley. "It knows it doesn't have the military capability to defeat the Americans, the British, Australians, Japanese and Koreans, in a hot war. So they are most unlikely to take it to that point."

Instead it is seeking to cause instability in the target country, and "perhaps a loss of confidence in the operational abilities of that target". It is also testing its own capabilities up against adversaries' defences, he said.

Tuffley said there was a danger of escalation. Other governments like the US and UK had high cyber-espionage capabilities themselves, but were not publicly threatening countermeasures against the Chinese state.

In its statement on Tuesday US authorities named individuals accused of conducting the cyber-attacks allegedly in breach of US law.

That suggested a deep level of knowledge about the attacks, including perhaps through human intelligence sources inside the Chinese operations, or a retaliatory information-gathering hack, one analyst said.

"Anyone who has worked in cybersecurity for any amount of time will not be at all surprised by this report from the UK authorities," said Adam Marrè, chief information security officer at Arctic Wolf.

"Beijing continues to see cyber as a natural extension of their statecraft and have seldom been afraid to utilise cyber techniques to further their own national interests."

—The Guardian

China assures Sri Lanka of support in debt restructuring

COLOMBO, 27 MARCH

Chinese Premier Li Qiang has assured his Sri Lankan counterpart Dinesh Gunawardena of Beijing's support to Colombo's debt restructuring process as the island nation tries to resurrect its bankrupt economy. Gunawardena, who is on an official tour of China, met Li on Tuesday in Beijing, a statement from the Sri Lankan prime minister's office said here. China is Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender owning 52 per cent of the USD 40 billion external debt when Sri Lanka announced its sovereign default in 2022. The Chinese assurance comes days after the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which concluded its second review of the USD 2.9 billion bailout with Sri Lanka, said reaching an agreement with the country's commercial creditors, the international bondholders and China Development Bank were the key to achieving debt sustainability. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PHOTO: X/20TH FOX

Titanic prop that kept Rose alive sells for $718,750

NEW YORK, 27 MARCH

The floating piece of wood that kept Titanic's Rose alive has been sold for $718,750 (£569,739) at auction. Ever since the release of the 1997 film, fans have wondered whether the panel was big enough to fit her love interest Jack as well, saving him from an icy death. The listing noted the prop "has caused much debate from fans". The sale was made during an auction of props and costumes owned by restaurant and resort chain Planet Hollywood. In the blockbuster, the fictional Jack, played by Leonardo Di Caprio, insists the panel - part of a door frame - was only big enough for his lover Rose, played by Kate Winslet. He later died in the freezing Atlantic, with his body falling into the depths of the ocean.—*BBC News*

Taylor Swift's dad avoids assault charge in Australia

NEW YORK, 27 MARCH

Taylor's Swift's father will not be charged over accusations he assaulted a paparazzo in Australia. Ben McDonald, 51, told police Scott Swift, 72, struck him in the face on a Sydney wharf on 27 February. He did not need medical help. A spokesperson for Swift at the time said two people had been behaving aggressively towards the megastar. After a month-long investigation, New South Wales police on Tuesday said no further action would be taken. The confrontation happened after Mr Swift and his daughter disembarked from a yacht, in the hours after her final Eras Tour show in Sydney. A video published by Australian media shows the singer, who is concealed beneath an umbrella, walking with her father and security guards along Neutral Bay Wharf at about 02:30 local time (15:30 GMT). —*BBC News*

Meta urged to lift ban on word 'shaheed'

ISLAMABAD, 27 MARCH

Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp — has been asked to lift a ban on the use of the Arabic word shaheed (meaning martyr) on its platforms, though the restrictions on describing "terrorists" as such will continue. Meta's Oversight Board, which is funded by Meta but operates independently, said in its advisory opinion that the policy to refer the term shaheed to individuals designated under its dangerous organisations and individuals policy disproportionately restricts free expression. The board has suggested that Meta's current policy was unnecessary, and that the company should end this blanket ban.—*Dawn*

Moscow, Pak attacks may be linked

PTM member said that Pakistan is double-gaming China as they did with the US

GENEVA, 27 MARCH

PTM member Fazal-ur-Rehman Afridi condemned the terrorist attack PHOTO: PHOTO: X/@IJREPJOURNALISM

Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) member Fazal-ur-Rehman Afridi alleged that there seems to be a link between the Moscow terror attack and the recent attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Shangla district, which has killed five Chinese nationals.

Stressing that not only Pakistan, but the whole world is in danger, Afridi said, "I think there seems to be a link between the Moscow terrorist attack and this Pakistani attack and more seems to be in the pipeline."

Further blaming the proxies of Pakistan, he said, "It will not stop until or unless Pakistanis are made accountable for their actions. And whatever is happening, it's through the proxies of Pakistan and the terrorists trained in the Pakistani training camp, especially the ISIS."

PTM member Fazal-ur-Rehman Afridi condemned the terrorist attack on the Chinese engineers in the Shangla district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"I would like to condemn the terrorist attack on the Chinese engineers in district Shangla in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which resulted in the killing of five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver," he said. He further said that Pakistan is double-gaming China as they did with the US.

"It seems that the proxies of Pakistan's army have carried out this attack and this time Pakistan is double-gaming China as they have done with the United States of America and the so-called war on terror," Afridi said. He added that they have been informing the international community, particularly the United Nations Human Rights Council and personally intervened at the UN Human Rights Council.

"It's on record that Pakistan and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have done a deal with each other. And 55,000 TTP leaders and their families are resettled in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," he said, adding that "some areas of former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which is now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been handed over to the TTP."

He further highlighted that there are terrorist training camps in Pakistan, where terrorists are trained to attack different communities in Pakistan. Earlier today, five Chinese nationals were killed in the attack. A Pakistani driver sustained injuries and was shifted to a local hospital, but he too succumbed to his wounds. The Chinese nationals were engineers who were going to Dasu camp, Kohistan, from Islamabad. —*ANI*

Taiwan tracks 9 Chinese aircraft, 6 naval vessels

TAIPEI, 27 MARCH

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) said that it detected nine Chinese military aircraft and six naval vessels operating around Taiwan between 6 am (local time) onv Tuesday to 6 am (local time) on Wednesday.

According to the Taiwan MND's statement, four of nine Chinese aircraft entered Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). Taiwanese armed forces monitored the situation and deployed CAP aircraft, naval vessels, and coastal missile systems in response to the Chinese activities."9 PLA aircraft and 6 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 am today. 4 of the aircraft entered Taiwan's SW and eastern ADIZ. #ROCArmedForces have monitored the situation and employed appropriate forces to respond," Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence said. The Taiwan MND said that it detected seven Chinese naval vessels and five Chinese military aircraft operating around the nation from 6 am (local time) on Sunday to 6 am (local time) on Monday. —*ANI*

US bridge collapse: 6 feared dead

BALTIMORE, 27 MARCH

All six workers missing after a Baltimore bridge collapsed Tuesday are presumed dead and the search for them has been suspended until Wednesday morning.

Col Roland L Butler Jr, Superintendent for Maryland State Police, said Tuesday evening that the search and rescue mission was transitioning to one of search and recovery. He said divers would return to the site at 6 am when challenging overnight conditions were expected to improve.

The six people unaccounted for were part of a construction crew repairing potholes on the bridge. Police had stopped traffic on the bridge just before the crash and said there is no evidence that anyone went into the water other than the workers.

Trade association director says ship's pilot tried to slow down

The pilot of the ship that caused the Baltimore bridge collapse tried to slow it down before the crash, the head of a trade association for maritime pilots said.

Clay Diamond, executive director of the American Pilots' Association, said he has been in close contact with officials from the Association of Maryland Pilots who described to him what happened as the ship approached the bridge. He said when the ship was a few minutes out, it lost all power, including to its engines.

The pilot immediately ordered the rudder hard to port to keep the ship from turning right and ordered the port anchor be dropped, which it was, Diamond said. The pilot also contacted a dispatch voffice to get the bridge shut down.

Diamond said widely circulated images show the ship's lights turning off and then back on, sparking questions about whether the vessel had regained power. But, he said, the emergency generators that kicked in turned the lights back on but not the ship's propulsion. Every foreign-flagged ship entering US waters must have a state-licensed pilot on board. —*PTI*

18 Gazans die trying to collect airdropped aid

Twelve people drowned and at least six were killed in stampedes PHOTO: CBC

GAZA STRIP, 27 MARCH

Twelve people drowned and at least six were killed in stampedes trying to recover aid airdropped into Gaza, local authorities said on Tuesday.

The deaths occurred in the north of the besieged territory on Monday, with people rushing to collect packages dropped from planes along Gaza's Mediterranean coast. The UN humanitarian office called on Tuesday for Israel to revoke a ban on food deliveries to northern Gaza from the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, saying people there were facing a "cruel death by famine".

Israel had earlier said it would stop working with UNRWA in Gaza, accusing the aid agency of perpetuating conflict. The agency said Israel told it that it would no longer approve its food convoys to north Gaza. Four such requests were denied since March 21, it said.

"The decision must be revoked," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) spokesperson Jens Laerke told a UN briefing in Geneva. "You cannot claim to adhere to these international provisions of law when you block UNRWA food convoys."

A UN-backed report this month said famine was imminent and likely to occur by May in northern Gaza. James Elder, spokesperson for the UN children's agency Unicef in Gaza, described seeing "paper thin" children in a hospital in northern Gaza and incubators full of underweight babies from malnourished mothers. —*Dawn*

7 Lebanese, 1 Israeli killed on Lebanon border

HEBBARIYE, 27 MARCH

An Israeli airstrike on a paramedics center linked to a Lebanese Sunni Muslim group in south Lebanon killed seven of its members early Wednesday and triggered a rocket attack from Lebanon that killed one person in northern Israel, officials said. The strike on the village of Hebbariye came after a day of airstrikes and rocket attacks between Israel's military and Lebanon's Hezbollah group along the Lebanon-Israel border, raising concerns of further escalation along the frontier that has been active for the past five months of the Israel-Hamas war. —*AP*

A Coast Guard cutter passes a cargo ship that is stuck under the part of the structure of the Francis Scott Key Bridge PHOTO: PTI

INTEL AGENCIES' INTERFERENCE IN JUDICIAL MATTERS: 6 PAK HC JUDGES

ISLAMABAD, 27 MARCH

In an unprecedented move, six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) sought intervention by the Supreme Judicial Council against the alleged interference in the working of the judiciary by Pakistan's powerful intelligence agencies.

A letter signed by six IHC judges demanded the SJC initiate a judicial convention against such interference in judicial affairs. The six judges who signed the March 25 dated letter include Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz.

The letter also advocated adopting a stance to ensure the judiciary's independence through the convention. The SJC is the highest body authorised to take action against judges of high and supreme courts.

"We are writing to seek guidance from the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) with regard to the duty of a judge to report and respond to actions on part of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, that seek to interfere with discharge of his/ her official functions and qualify as intimidation, as well as the duty to report any such actions that come to his/her attention in relation to colleagues and/or members of the courts that the High Court supervises," the letter stated. —*PTI*

Hunger deepens as gang violence targets Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 26 MARCH

Gangs have intensified their rampage in the downtown area of Haiti's capital, setting fire to a school and looting pharmacies across the road from the country's largest public hospital.

The attacks that began Monday and continued into early Tuesday mark nearly a month since gunmen began targeting key infrastructure across Port-au-Prince including police stations, the main international airport that remains closed and Haiti's two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates. "The violence and instability in Haiti have consequences far beyond the risk of the violence itself," Catherine Russell, UNICEF's executive director, said in a statement Tuesday. "The situation is creating a child health and nutrition crisis that could cost the lives of countless of children."

The number of children in Haiti estimated to suffer from severe acute malnutrition has increased by 19% this year, according to UNICEF. In addition, some 1.64 million people are on the precipice of famine. "This malnutrition crisis is entirely human made," Russell said.

Violence has forced the closure of roads and certain hospitals and prevented aid groups from delivering critical supplies at a time they are needed the most. —*AP*

Argentina to slash 70,000 government jobs

RIO, 27 MARCH

On Tuesday, Argentine President Javier Milei sharply criticized past "populist" regimes, unveiling plans to cut 70,000 government positions.

This move marks a deeper push into fiscal reforms that began in December. Milei, speaking in Buenos Aires at the International Economic Forum of the Americas, reflected on the grave challenges he faced from day one. He took office on December 10 and has since enacted several reforms.

He accused previous administrations of leading Argentina into severe economic distress, destroying capital and productivity. This, Milei explained, plunged the country into a dire situation. Inflation nearly triggered hyperinflation in early December, with prices soaring by 1% daily.

Milei underscored the launch of a strict stabilization plan to avert financial disaster while prioritizing social welfare.

The populist era, according to Milei, saw Argentines lose 80% of their earnings, pushing over half into poverty and 10% into extreme hardship. Milei outlined fiscal adjustments his administration has made to aim for zero deficit.

These include halting discretionary funding to provinces and dismissing 50,000 public workers, with plans to terminate an additional 20,000 contracts.

Despite the hurdles, Milei is optimistic, pointing to a shift in public sentiment. Initially, only 20% of citizens felt hopeful about their future, but this number has since climbed to 50%.

Courtesy, —*Rio Times*

BILL PASSED

Thailand to legalise same-sex marriage

BANGKOK, 27 MARCH

Thailand has taken a historic step closer to marriage equality after the lower house passed a bill giving legal recognition to same-sex marriage.

It still needs approval from the Senate and royal endorsement to become law. But it is widely expected to happen by the end of 2024, making Thailand the only South East Asian country to recognise same-sex unions.

It will cement Thailand's reputation as a relative haven for LGBTQ+ couples in a region where such attitudes are rare. "This is the beginning of equality. It's not a universal cure to every problem but it's the first step towards equality," Danuphorn Punnakanta, an MP and chairman of the lower house's committee on marriage equality, told parliament while presenting a draft of the bill. "This law wants to return these rights to this group of people, not grant them the rights."

The bill still needs approval from the Senate PHOTO: PTI

The new law, which was passed by 400 of 415 of lawmakers present, will describe marriage as a partnership between two individuals, instead of between a man and woman. And it will give LGBTQ+ couples equal rights to get marital tax savings, to inherit property, and to give medical treatment consent for partners who are incapacitated.

Under the law, married same-sex couples can also adopt children. However, the lower house did not adopt the committee's suggestion to use the term "parents" instead of "fathers and mothers". Thailand already has laws that ban discrimination over gender identity and sexual orientation and is, therefore, seen as one of Asia's most LGBTQ+ friendly nations.

But it has taken many years of campaigning for same-sex couples to come this close to marriage equality. Past attempts to legalise same-sex marriage failed despite broad public support. A government survey late last year showed that 96.6% of those polled were in favour of the bill. "Yes, I'm watching the parliamentary debate and keeping my fingers crossed," says Phisit Sirihirunchai, a 35-year-old openly gay police officer. —*BBC News*

Gold rises Rs 150; silver declines Rs 250

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Gold price rose Rs 150 to Rs 67,000 per 10g in the local market on Wednesday in line with firm trends globally, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 66,850 per 10g. However, silver prices declined by Rs 250 to Rs 77,250 per kg. In the previous close, it had settled at Rs 77,500 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 67,000 per 10 grams, up by Rs 150 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,180 per ounce, up by USD 7 from the previous close. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 7p to close at 83.36 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

The rupee declined by 7 paise to close at 83.36 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking a strong American currency against major rivals overseas and weak Asian peers. However, a surge in domestic markets and a decline in crude oil prices cushioned the downside, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.33 and touched an intraday low of 83.45 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.36 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 7 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee recovered from all-time low levels and appreciated 32 paise to close at 83.29 against the US dollar. According to Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the Indian rupee depreciated on Wednesday on strong US dollar and importer demand for US dollar. Weak Asian currencies also weighed on the rupee. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.03 per cent lower at 104.26. *—PTI*

India key country for philanthropy, tech: Bill Gates

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Billionaire and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates on Wednesday emphasised India's pivotal role in his philanthropic endeavours and technological aspirations. Gates, speaking virtually from Seattle at the Times Now Summit, underscored India's significance both in his past actions with Microsoft and in his current charitable efforts through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "India is a key country for us," Gates said while highlighting the profound impact the nation has had on his career trajectory and his philanthropic vision. "It's the country that we have the most on-the-ground activities and very deep partnership with many of the ministries at the union level and with several of the states," he said. *—ANI*

DGCA probes IndiGo plane hitting AI flight in Kolkata

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) off-rostered pilots of IndiGo Airlines on Wednesday and ordered a detailed investigation after an Indigo plane hit a stationary Air India Express aircraft while taxiing at Kolkata Airport . A senior DGCA official informed that after the incident both the pilots of the IndiGo A320 VT-ISS plane hit stationary Air India Express 737 VT-TGG during a taxi in Kolkata "The ground staff will also be questioned during the investigation. Both the flights have been grounded for detailed inspection," the official said. "The wingtip of a taxiing aircraft of another airline grazed one of our aircraft, which was stationary and awaiting clearance to enter the runway at Kolkata for a scheduled operation to Chennai. *—ANI*

Markets to start T+0 settlement cycle

The same day settlement method will start today

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Stock exchanges BSE and NSE are all set to introduce the beta version of the T+0 or same-day trade settlement, on an optional basis, for select stocks from Thursday.

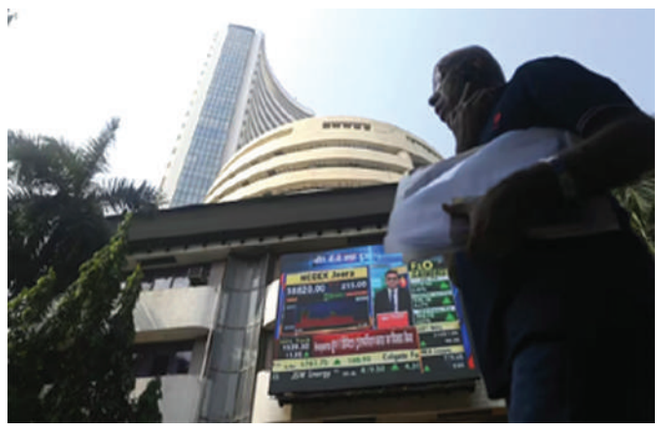
This will be in addition to the existing T+1 settlement cycle in the equity cash market.

To begin with, the option of T+0 trade settlements will be available for a limited set of 25 scrips and with a limited number of brokers.

T+0 means settlements on the same day and the move will bring cost and time efficiency, transparency in charges to investors and strengthen risk management at clearing corporations and the overall securities market ecosystem.

In a circular on Thursday, BSE came out with the list of 25 scrips wherein the option of T+0 settlement cycle would be available. The scrips included Bajaj Auto, Vedanta, Hindalco Industries, State Bank of India (SBI), Trent, Tata Communications, Nestle India, Cipla, MRF, JSW Steel, BPCL, ONGC, NMDC and Ambuja Cements.

After deliberations and approval of the SEBI'S board, the regulator last week put in place a framework for introduction of the Beta version of T+0 settlement cycle on an optional basis from 28 March.



BSE came out with the list of 25 scrips wherein the option of T+0 settlement cycle will be available **PHOTO: PTI**

Sebi, in its effort to keep pace with the changing times and carry out its mandate of development of securities markets and investor protection, shortened the settlement cycle to T+3 from T+5 in 2002 and subsequently to T+2 in 2003.

Under the new framework, all investors will be eligible to participate in the T+0 settlement cycle, if they are able to meet the timelines, process and risk requirements as prescribed by the market infrastructure institutions. Further, trade timing will be between 9.15 am and 1.30 pm.

The surveillance measures as applicable in T+1 settlement cycle will be applicable to scrips in T+0 settlement cycle. T+0 prices will not be considered in index calculation and settlement price computation. There will be no separate close price for securities brd on trading in T+0 segment. *—PTI*

- Stock exchanges BSE and NSE are all set to introduce the beta version of the T+0 or same-day trade settlement, on an optional basis, for select stocks from Thursday.

MARKETS REBOUND ON HEAVY BUYING IN RELIANCE, HDFC

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply on Wednesday following heavy buying in index majors Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 526.01 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 72,996.31. During the day, it jumped 668.43 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,138.73.

The NSE Nifty went up by 118.95 points or 0.54 per cent to 22,123.65.

From the Sensex basket, Reliance Industries jumped 3.50 per cent, contributing the most to the rise. Maruti, Bajaj Finance, Titan, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were among the major gainers.

Wipro, HCL Technologies, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services and Tata Motors were among the laggards in the market.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory, while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned net buyers on Tuesday, as they bought equities worth Rs 10.13 crore, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.96 per cent to USD 85.42 a barrel. *—PTI*

PROUD MOMENT

IIT Madras' Pavan Davuluri to lead Microsoft Windows

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Microsoft has internally merged the Windows and Surface teams once again, appointing IIT Madras alumni Pavan Davuluri to lead development on both fronts.

According to Windows Central- a news site that tracks developments at Microsoft, the decision comes after a brief separation, during which Windows briefly fell under Microsoft's new AI organisation.

The reunion of Windows and Surface teams marks a return to a familiar structure within Microsoft's Engineering and Devices organisation, headed by Rajesh Jha.

Pavan Davuluri, previously overseeing Microsoft's hardware endeavours, will now take the helm of Windows engineering as well.

The reshuffle follows the departure of ex-Windows and Surface chief Panos Panay last September, whose role was effectively split between Davuluri and Mikhail Parakhin.

Parakhin took charge of Windows, alongside his existing responsibilities as CEO of Web and Advertising at Microsoft, overseeing products such as Bing, Edge, and Copilot.

However, recent developments within Microsoft, including the appointment of DeepMind co-founder Mustafa Suleyman as CEO of a new AI division, prompted a re-evaluation of team structures.

IIT Madras alumni Pavan Davuluri **PHOTO: X/@PAVANDAVULURI**

With Parakhin's team absorbed into the new AI division, he has announced his intention to explore other roles, likely outside the company.

As a result, Windows is now realigned under Rajesh Jha's leadership, ensuring that development is overseen by the same individual who guides Surface development.

This move is welcomed by Windows enthusiasts, as it promises increased collaboration and cohesion between Microsoft's hardware and software endeavours.

Over the past year, Davuluri has been instrumental in driving Microsoft's efforts to optimize Windows for Arm-based devices. *—ANI*

STARTING APRIL

RBI asked to clarify rules on exchange-traded Rupee

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Commodity Participants Association of India (CPAI) on Wednesday sought timely clarification and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document from the stock exchanges on the RBI's new rule for rupee derivatives that will come into effect on 5 April.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in a 5 January circular said the recognised stock exchanges may offer forex derivative contracts involving rupee to users "for the purpose of hedging contracted exposure". In 2008, RBI had allowed transactions in rupee/dollar currency futures to "hedge an exposure to foreign exchange rate risk or otherwise".

CPAI said the new rule has confused brokers and sought clarification with respect to para 3.4a of the new rule for rupee derivatives.

Para 3.4a states that the stock exchanges will inform clients that while they are not required to provide proof of underlying exposure. *—PTI*

Banks to remain profitable: Fitch

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Fitch Ratings has projected that Indian banks will sustain their profitability despite facing margin pressure in the medium term.

According to Fitch, while net interest margins (NIMs) are anticipated to narrow by 10 to 20 basis points over the next two years from the current cyclical peak of 3.6 per cent in the nine months of the financial year ending March 2024 (9MFY24), the sector's earnings resilience will persist.

The narrowing of NIMs is primarily attributed to increasing funding costs, driven by intensified competition for deposits amidst normalizing liquidity conditions and robust loan growth.

Fitch underscores that despite the banking sector's heavy reliance on net interest income, which contributed 75 per cent of total operating income in 9MFY24, profitability is expected to remain intact.

The credit rating agency highlights that there is potential for banks to mitigate the impact of margin compression through cost control measures and enhanced efficiency derived from digitalization initiatives.

Furthermore, Fitch anticipates a further decline in impaired-loan ratios across most banks, which could contribute to lowering operating and credit costs.

However, Fitch warns that the aggressive funding of higher risk-weighted loans, such as consumer credit and loans to non-bank financial institutions, could limit additional improvement in operating profit/risk-weighted assets (OP/RWAs).

To counter margin pressure, Indian banks are expected to redirect investments in government securities towards loan growth, thereby balancing growth objectives with margin considerations.

This shift is evident in the rising proportion of loans in the banking sector's assets, reaching approximately 63 per cent in 9MFY24 from 56 per cent in FY22. While the transition from investments to loans aids in offsetting margin pressure, it also escalates risk density within banks' portfolios. *—ANI*

IndiGo to double in size, fly to more global destinations: CEO

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

IndiGo aims to double in size by 2030 with new domestic and international routes as well as destinations, its chief Pieter Elbers said as the airline pursues soaring global ambitions to match India's economic growth potential.

The country's largest airline with a domestic market share of little over 60 per cent is also betting big on A321 XLR aircraft that are expected to be part of its fleet "somewhere in 2025", to further expand its overseas presence.

Seeking to consolidate as well as expand its position on the global scale, Elbers told PTI in an interview that the next big jump for IndiGo will be to double its size by the end of the decade. For the next financial year starting April 2024, he said the capacity guidance in terms of seat capacity is "early double digits" and one plane is coming in every week. Amid supply chain as well as Pratt & Whitney engine woes, Elbers also emphasised that the airline is taking a lot of mitigating measures that are bearing fruits, and that the Aircraft on Ground (AOG) situation is "stable".

Currently, the 17-year-old carrier operates to 88 domestic and 33 international destinations **PHOTO: PTI**

In February, the airline said the number of AOGs was in the mid-70s. Currently, the 17-year-old carrier operates to 88 domestic and 33 international destinations. It has a fleet of more than 360 planes. *—PTI*

ADANI COMMISSIONS NEW 180 MW SOLAR PLANT IN JAISALMER

AHMEDABAD, 27 MARCH

Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL), India's largest and one of the world's leading renewable energy (RE) companies, has commissioned a 180 MW solar power plant at Devikot in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.

A statement from the company said that the plant has a 25-year power purchase agreement (PPA) with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI).

The 180 MW solar plant will produce approximately 540 million electricity units annually, powering over 1.1 lakh homes and reducing around 0.39 million tonnes of CO2 emissions. *—PTI*

Watchdog starts enquiries against fintech companies

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Fair trade watchdog CCI is conducting enquiries against some fintech entities to check whether their ways of leveraging technologies are impacting competition, its chief Ravneet Kaur said and asserted that the regulator is taking necessary action to ensure a competitive digital market.

With a slew of amended regulations, key rulings against anti-competitive practices in the digital market and advocacy efforts, the CCI is strengthening its efforts to curb unfair business ways.

In an interview to PTI, Competition Commission of India (CCI) Chairperson Ravneet Kaur said there is an increased sensitisation among entities about the competition law and stressed the focus is on "striking the right balance between regulation and freedom".

Ravneet Kaur **PHOTO: PTI**

According to her, the regulator is focused on big tech companies as well as various other sectors, including fintech and online intermediary service providers.

Without divulging specific details, she also said the regulator is looking into some cases in the film industry, especially those related to film distributors. *—PTI*

Housing sales in Jan-Mar rise 14% in B'luru, Pune

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Housing sales have risen 14 per cent, while average prices are up 10-32 per cent across seven major cities during the January-March period of this year, as demand continues to be strong, according to Anarock.

The sales of residential properties increased in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Pune, Bengaluru and Hyderabad, but declined in Delhi-NCR, Chennai and Kolkata.

On Wednesday, real estate consultant Anarock released its data for the top seven primary (first sale) residential markets in the country.

As per the data, housing sales rose 14 per cent to 1,30,170 units during January-March quarter this year across top seven cities, from 1,13,775 units in the year-ago period.

"The quarter has recorded the highest ever sales in the last decade amid a significant rise in demand for high-ticket homes priced Rs 1.5 crore and above," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said.

PHOTO: PTI

Among cities, the housing sales in MMR rose 24 per cent to 42,920 units during January-March, from 34,690 units in the year-ago period.

In Pune, housing sales went up 15 per cent to 22,990 units from 19,920 units.

Hyderabad saw a 38 per cent increase in housing sales to 19,660 units from 14,280 units.

Housing sales in Bengaluru rose 14 per cent to 17,790 units from 15,660 units.

However, Delhi-NCR witnessed a 9 per cent decline in housing sales to 15,650 units from 17,160 units. *—PTI*

US BRIDGE COLLAPSE

Moody warns of coal trade disruptions

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

In the aftermath of collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge on Tuesday, Moody's Analytics has released an analysis highlighting potential disruptions to the global coal market.

The collapse, which has prompted the suspension of trade through the Port of Baltimore as investigations ensue, underscores the vulnerability of global supply chains and raises concerns about the resilience of critical infrastructure.

While the full extent of the disaster's impact remains uncertain, Moody's Analytics warns of potential ramifications for the coal market, with over a quarter of US seaborne coal exports facing potential disruptions, constituting about 1.5 per cent of the global coal trade.

The coal market, a critical component of global energy supply, is expected to feel the ripple effects of the Baltimore Bridge collapse.

Moody's Analytics warns of potential ramifications for the coal market, with over a quarter of US seaborne coal exports facing potential disruptions **PHOTO: PTI**

With a significant portion of US seaborne coal exports passing through the Port of Baltimore, disruptions in coal shipments could reverberate across global coal trade dynamics.

Moody's Analytics cautions that such disruptions could trigger shifts in supplier relationships, reminiscent of past instances where geopolitical actions led to significant market fluctuations.

Furthermore, the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge has cast a shadow over Baltimore's role as a key import hub for vehicles, primarily affecting auto markets.

Asia-Pacific's largest car exporters, including China and Japan, are likely to bear the brunt of the incident, as Baltimore's import activities play a crucial role in their supply chains.

Despite the potential for initial disruptions, historical precedents suggest that global trade has demonstrated resilience in the face of similar challenges.

Instances such as China's ban on Australian coal and sanctions on Russian coal have shown that supply chains have the capacity to adapt by seeking alternative sources and markets.

Moody's Analytics suggests that while there may be short-term disruptions, the long-term impacts on coal and vehicle prices are likely to be minimized as global trade adjusts to new dynamics.

Although the Baltimore bridge collapse is not expected to have significant implications for Asia-Pacific macroeconomic data, it serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of global supply chains. *—PTI*

DC eyes maiden win of season vs Royals

Porel was used as an impact player as Delhi was a bowler short

JAIPUR, 27 MARCH

Skipper Rishabh Pant will look to overcome his rustiness as Delhi Capitals aim for an improved batting display in their bid for a first win of the IPL season when they take on Rajasthan Royals here on Thursday.

Pant's much-anticipated return to action 453 days after he suffered grievous injuries in a horrific car accident, lasted just 13 balls (18 runs) with Punjab Kings winning by four wickets at their new home ground in Mullanpur.

Pant, though, displayed his usual lively demeanor behind the stumps and also affected the stumping of Jitesh Sharma.

"It's exciting to have your captain back in the team. He is our leader and heartbeat of this franchise and having him back is going to make this team a lot stronger," head coach Ricky Ponting had said of Pant ahead of the IPL.

Ponting chose David Warner and Mitchell Marsh to open the innings in the hope that the duo would score enough runs to take the pressure off Pant lower down the order. But the two failed to capitalize on good starts and the pressure soon came on Pant.

Sanju Samson and Rishabh Pant **PHOTO: PTI**

Wicketkeeper-batter Abhishek Porel's unbeaten 32-run cameo was the only bright spot in DC's batting, which lifted them to a respectable 174/9 from a precarious 138/7 at one stage.

Porel was used as an impact player as Delhi was a bowler short. The problem was worsened further after Ishant Sharma twisted his ankle. The lanky pacer could miss a few matches as well.

Delhi's spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel will have a bigger role to play after what was witnessed on a dry surface at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium the other day when Rajasthan Royals' opening duo of Jos Buttler and Yashasvi Jaiswal faced some early hiccups against Lucknow Super Giants.

However, Sanju Samson struck an unbeaten 82 as the Royals won by 20 runs. By scoring a fifty in his team's first match of the season for the fifth successive time, Samson has become an early contender for the hotly-contested spot for the wicketkeeper-batter's slot in the upcoming T20 World Cup.

With Riyan Parag also among the runs, the Royals top-four will pose questions to the Delhi bowling lineup, and here's where Kuldeep and Axar's overs will be crucial in the middle.

The Royals' bowling has also hit the right notes with Trent Boult leading the charge with the new ball. Sandeep Sharma has also been superb in the death overs.

The rookie Indian dismissed KL Rahul at 58 in the 17th over and also stymied Nicholas Pooran in the penultimate over as RR restricted Lucknow Super Giants to 173/6. —*PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

DELHI CAPITALS vs RAJASTHAN ROYALS

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur

Any team is bound to miss a bowler like Shami: Mohit

CHENNAI, 27 MARCH

MOHIT SHARMA **PHOTO: PTI**

Gujarat Titans pace bowler Mohit Sharma conceded it was hard to replace a bowler of the caliber of Mohammed Shami as his team succumbed to a massive 63-run defeat at the hands of reigning IPL champions Chennai Super Kings here.

India's premier pacer Shami is sitting out of the IPL as he is recuperating from ankle surgery. He is expected to make his comeback with the home Test series against Bangladesh later this year after missing the five-Test series against England. Shami will also miss the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by the West Indies and the USA in June.

"Any team is bound to miss a bowler like Shami, and you can't replace him with anyone. But injuries are uncontrollable, and you must see how to move ahead with it," said Sharma, who played for CSK between 2013 and 2015 and has been with the Titans since 2022, during the post-match press conference.

"As for GT, it's the first year for Spencer (Johnson) and Azmatullah (Omarzai). They haven't played much cricket yet. Therefore, we must be patient with them and not become too result-oriented.

"We must not bother about the runs leaked or the result of the contest, but how successful we are with our plans and how we are working on it backstage. These things would come in handy in the second half (of the event)," opined Sharma.

—*PTI*

SRH smash highest total in IPL

HYDERABAD, 27 MARCH

Records tumbled left-right and center as Sunrisers Hyderabad smashed 277 for three, the highest total in IPL history, to leave Mumbai Indians shell-shocked here on Wednesday.

Travis Head (62 off 24) and Abhishek Sharma (63 off 23) came up with a sensational display of power-hitting, that saw the latter snatching the franchise record for the fastest fifty from the Australian within minutes.

Heinrich Klaasen (80 not out off 34 balls) provided the fireworks in the end to help SRH break an 11-year-old record. The previous highest total in IPL was 263 for five achieved by Royal Challengers Bangalore back in 2013.

It was raining fours and sixes throughout the innings as Head and Sharma toyed with the Mumbai Indians attack.

Head, who was surprisingly left out of the playing eleven for the opening game, reinforced his status as one of the most dangerous batters in the game with a whirlwind effort.

Sunrisers Hyderabad batter Heinrich Klaasen celebrates his half-century during the IPL match between Hyderabad and Mumbai **PHOTO: PTI**

He broke David Warner's record of the fastest fifty by an SRH batter with an 18-ball half-century before Sharma surpassed Head's feat 20 balls later by reaching the milestone in 16 balls.

The southpaw completed his fifty with an inside-out four wide of mid-off before dispatching a bouncer from Gerald Coetzee for a six over deep midwicket, prompting opposition skipper Hardik Pandya to acknowledge the Australian's brutal assault.

—*PTI*

SHARMA COUNTING ON EXPERIENCE AT INDIA OPEN

GURUGRAM, 27 MARCH

An experienced Shubhankar Sharma is hopeful that being in a relaxed mind space with an overall improvement in his game will help him break his title jinx at the Hero Indian Open and keep him firmly on course for a ticket to Paris Olympics.

"I've been feeling very good about my game. Since 2018, I have come close many times, including last week when I was tied for the lead at one point on the final day. I'm glad that I'm in form coming into my home event," Shubhankar told reporters.

The Chandigarh-born golfer, whose last win came at the 2018 Maybank Championship, had come close to clinching the title at the Porsche Singapore Classic when he shared the lead on the back nine of the final day before finishing tied-seventh on Sunday."This is our fifth major. And this is my second home DLF. —*PTI*

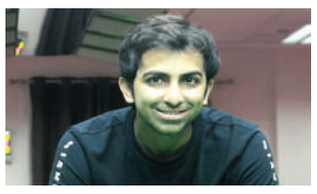
MS DHONI IS USING THE 'IMPACT PLAYER' RULE: HUSSEY

CHENNAI, 27 MARCH

Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey said that the 'Impact Player' rule has lengthened their batting order, allowing former skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni to come in as late as number eight during this IPL. The 'Impact Player' rule, introduced in the 2023 edition, allows each franchise to name five substitutes, one of whom could come on as a substitute during the match. Playing against Gujarat Titans here on Tuesday, CSK managed to post a match-winning total of 206 for six. —*PTI*

Billiards: Pankaj fires in with top 305 break

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH



PANKAJ ADVANI **PHOTO: PTI**

World champion Pankaj Advani of India oozed class with a triple century break of 305 as he tamed compatriot Rovin D'Souza and cruised to a comprehensive 1197-156 point win in his opening Group-A league match of the All India CCI Billiards Classic here on Wednesday.

Advani, who last November won a grand double, triumphing the time format and long-up in the IBSF World Billiards Championship, played with sublime touch as he executed his shots with perfection and took complete control of the match.

Besides, Advani dominated the table for long periods and collected breaks of 188, 162, 191, 92, and 97, sailing to a fluent win.

Earlier, India's number two Sourav Kothari, and Peter Sheehan of England were also in good touch, recording sizable breaks during their respective opening group matches. —*PTI*

MEDVEDEV, ALCARAZ ADVANCE TO Q/FS

MIAMI GARDENS, 27 MARCH

Defending Miami Open champion Daniil Medvedev won his 350th career match to move into the quarterfinals for a fourth straight year, beating Dominik Koepfer 7-6 (5), 6-0 on Tuesday.

Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz also advanced with ease in a 6-3, 6-3 win over No. 23 seed Lorenzo Musetti.

Alcaraz, who beat Musetti in less than 90 minutes and looked comfortable as ever on the court, said he's "probably" playing his best tennis since last summer. That ankle injury from last month is no longer a concern, he said. —*AP*

Bopanna-Ebden reaches s/fs

MIAMI GARDENS 26 MARCH

BOPANNA AND MATTHEW **PHOTO: AFP**

Indian tennis stalwart Rohan Bopanna and his Australian teammate Matthew Ebden advanced to their third men's doubles semi-final this year, defeating Dutchman Sem Verbeek and Aussie John-Patrick Smith at the Miami Open here.

The duo, who had won the Australian Open earlier this year, overcame several unforced errors in the first set to win the grueling quarterfinal 3-6 7-6 (4) 10-7.

The cut-off date for rankings to be considered for direct Paris qualification is June 10.

The Bopanna-Ebden pair, seeded No.1 here, didn't enjoy a dominant first and second-serve percentage but came up with breaks at crucial junctures in the second set to take the match into the tie-breaker before winning it and drawing level.Bopanna, who won his maiden grand slam at the Australian Open this year, had attained a career-high world No. 1 ranking following the success but has slipped to second spot after a quarterfinal loss at the Dubai Championships and a round-of-32 exit at the Indian Wells Masters.The Indo-Australian pair will meet the winners of the match between Marcel Granollers (Spain)/Horacio Zeballos (Argentina) and Lloyd Glasspool (UK)/Jean-Julien Rojer (Netherlands) in the last four.Bopanna and Ebden had also reached the semifinal of the Adelaide Open in January this year and made the title round before losing to Rajeev Ram (USA) and Joe Salisbury (UK). —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Shubman Gill fined Rs 12 lakh for slow overrate

CHENNAI, 27 MARCH

Gujarat Titans skipper Shubman Gill was on Wednesday fined Rs 12 lakh for maintaining a slow over-rate during their match against Chennai Super Kings here."As it was his team's first offense of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to a minimum over-rate offenses, Gill was fined Rs 12 lakhs," an IPL statement said. The Gill-led side suffered its first defeat in this edition of the tournament, going down to defending champions Chennai Super Kings by 63 runs here on Tuesday. Leading an IPL franchise for the first time, Gill's Gujarat Titans won their opening match against Mumbai Indians by six runs.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

'Stimac ouster cry' grows after shock India defeat

KOLKATA, 27 MARCH

Former India footballers feel there is 'discord' in the changing room and demanded the ouster of head coach Igor Stimac following India's shocking 1-2 defeat to Afghanistan in the World Cup qualifiers. Talismanic Sunil Chhetri struck in his landmark 150th international fixture but the 117th-ranked India squandered the one-goal advantage at halftime to let in two second-half goals by the world No 158 Afghanistan in their return leg clash in Guwahati on Tuesday.Former India defender Gourmangi Singh feels something is "amiss" in the Indian dressing room, while former forward Dipendu Biswas slammed Stimac's skewed team selection for the disastrous show and demanded his immediate ouster.Echoing similar views, veteran Subrata Bhattacharya said that foreign coaches never brought laurels to the Indian team and called for an Indian coach to produce players of the caliber.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Sindhu makes a winning start at Madrid Masters

MADRID, 27 MARCH

Double Olympic medallist P V Sindhu progressed to the second round of the Madrid Spain Masters with a straight-game win over Canada's Wen Yu Zhang here on Wednesday. Sindhu, who finished as runner-up in the last edition, saw off world no. 49 Zhang 21-16 21-12 in a lop-sided contest. Sindhu, a former world champion, will meet Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu-Hsun next. The half an hour clash had some exciting moments as the two players fought hard for supremacy with Sindhu conceding a 4-2 lead to Zhang, who could only manage a one-point advantage at the break. After resumption, the Indians pulled away from 14-14 to seal the opening game. The second game was an easy affair as Sindhu jumped to 11-6 after 4-4 at one stage. The Indian kept moving ahead as Zhang's game crumbled under pressure.—*PTI*

EURO 2024

Füllkrug scores as host Germany beats Netherlands 2-1

FRANKFURT, 27 MARCH

Germany substitute Niclas Füllkrug scored late to give the European Championship host a morale-boosting 2-1 win over the Netherlands in their friendly on Tuesday.

The excellent Dutch goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen tried fishing Füllkrug's effort off the line in the 85th minute, but a check confirmed the ball had crossed the line, giving Germany its second win from two games after its 2-0 victory over France on Saturday.

It ended a Dutch run of four straight wins and rewarded Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann for a team shake-up that included six new faces and Toni Kroos' return from international retirement.

The Real Madrid star's corner provided the platform for Füllkrug to score the winner as Germany recovered from conceding an early goal.

A poor pass from Maximilian Mittelstädt for Jonathan Tah allowed Memphis Depay to cross for Joey Veerman, who scored with a volley in the fourth minute.

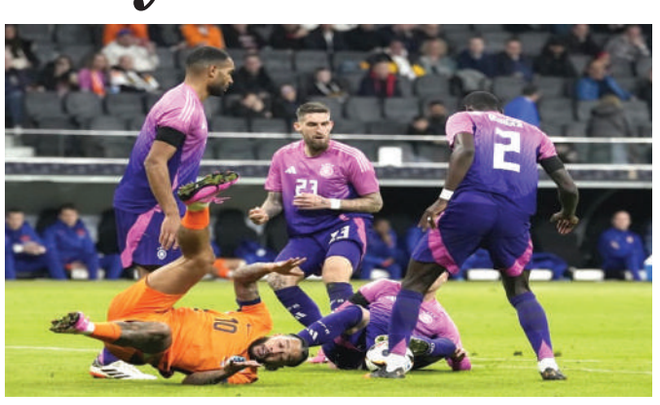
It gave Nagelsmann the conditions he had asked for before the game — a character test in the face of adversity for his players — who responded with ball possession before Mittelstädt atoned for his earlier mistake with the equalizer in the 11th.

Jamal Musiala crossed the ball after a Kroos corner and Mittelstädt struck it perfectly outside the penalty area to send it in off the underside of the crossbar.

Peter Schilling's 1980s hit "Major Tom" rang around the stadium for the first time. Thousands of German fans had signed a petition to make it the official German goal jingle. The team in pink also a first for Germany dominated possession for the rest of the half, though Ilkay Gündogan had to clear the ball ahead of Donyell Malen after a Dutch free kick that could have yielded the visitors' second goal.

Tijjani Reijnders and Depay had the best Dutch chances before Verbruggen denied Mittelstädt and then Musiala before he was finally beaten.

"Today we had an even more challenging game than against the French, because the variability that Holland has in the build-up is extraordinary, with a lot of positional changes," Nagelsmann said. "It was a very good game and something we can analyze about the European Championship."



Germany's Niclas Fullkrug celebrates with teammates after scoring his sides second goal **PHOTO: AFP**

- Germany substitute Niclas Füllkrug scored late to give the European Championship host a morale-boosting 2-1 win over the Netherlands in their friendly on Tuesday.

Germany next plays in June against Ukraine and Greece for its final Euro 2024 warmup games. It opens the tournament against Scotland in Munich on 14 June, then plays Hungary in Stuttgart on June 19 and Switzerland in Frankfurt on 23 June. —*AP*